

DOCTORAL THESIS

Orlando Fals-Borda or The Ethics of Subversion: Towards a Critique of Ideology of Political Violence in Colombia, 1948–1974

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Award date:
2017

Awarding institution:
University of Roehampton

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Orlando Fals-Borda
or
**The Ethics of Subversion:
Towards a Critique of Ideology of Political
Violence in Colombia, 1948–1974**

by
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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of PhD**

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2017

Abstract

This thesis is an inter-disciplinary project incorporating history, philosophy, sociology, theology and political analysis. It looks at highly significant, yet little researched, aspects of the intellectual history of Colombian sociologist and political leader Orlando Fals-Borda, 1925–2008.

The thesis reconstructs the early period of Fals-Borda's career, 1948–1974, and reveals first-hand information about his original thinking gathered from his works, published and unpublished, and vast correspondence (much previously unknown) scattered in five different archives in Colombia, the USA and Switzerland. It establishes the foundations for comprehending one of the central themes of Fals-Borda's intellectual and political career: his critique of ideology of political violence in Colombia.

A basic tenet of this research is that intellectual history, rather than the objective presentation of somebody's intellectual work within his/her historical context, implies a philosophical understanding of his/her main concerns. Thus, this interplay between intellectual history and critique makes this research far more than a historiography of Fals-Borda's ideas since it explores his original insight into the complexities of the long-running violence in Colombia.

The framework which supports this interplay between intellectual history and critique is Walter Benjamin's 'Critique of the Violence' and 'Theses on Philosophy of History'. Through the lens of Benjamin's philosophy about violence and history, this thesis examines Fals-Borda's ethics of subversion in a new light.

Another central tenet of this research is that understanding the past is crucial for understanding the present, and vice versa. Thus, it highlights the importance of the ethical-theological, historical and epistemological bases leading to Fals-Borda's development of Participatory Action Research (PAR). This approach is especially relevant to the current political situation and debate on democratic participation and socio-economic and human rights in Colombia, in the light of peace negotiations between the government, guerrilla groups and civil society.

To my mother, Clare and Amelie

and

to the memory of my father

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Acknowledgements

Writing a thesis is a very personal task which is only possible due to the generous support and encouragement of a great many of people and institutions. I am deeply grateful to Roehampton University for awarding me one of the Sacred Heart full scholarships for the period 2012–2015. This privileged opportunity enabled me to devote three years full-time to my research. When this support came to an end and the thesis was still far from completion, I was exceedingly fortunate in being welcomed by my good friends, Gill and Rolf, to use a spacious studio in their marvellous floating home on the River Thames. Their generosity enabled me to dedicate one more, and crucial, year to writing up the thesis. My greatest debt of gratitude is to them. I am also especially grateful to Dr Carrie Hamilton, Dr Eric Jacobson and Professor Mike Edwards for their able supervision, continuous support and motivation. I am particularly grateful to Dr Hamilton for her willingness to spend the necessary hours reading and discussing my research throughout the past four years. I also owe her a particular debt for her guidance when this project seemed to be beyond my capacity. When I first applied, she saw potential in my research proposal — I hope she is pleased with the final outcome. My special thanks go to my partner, Clare, for her patient understanding of the need to devote time to my project and for her dedication to our little daughter, Amelie.

In Colombia, I enjoyed the encouragement and trust of Rev. Professor Alberto Parra, S.J., the expert advice of Dr Carlos Enrique Angarita and the help of Mónica Moreno who generously shared archive material from the Presbyterian Historical Society in the U.S. and boxes from the Fondo Acumulado of the Faculty of Sociology obtained for her own research. This data was vital for my research. I would also like to express my thanks to Professor Joanne Rappaport and Dr Carlos Enrique Angarita whose

comments on two chapters helped improve their final version significantly; Dr Rappaport who shared a document from the Fondo Orlando Fals-Borda Banco de la República, Montería, which I analysed in the closing chapter; Father Fernán Fernández, S.J., Dr John Jairo Serna, Professor Jaime Eduardo Jaramillo and posthumously, Dr Carlos Emilio Gaviria Díaz, Chief Executive of the Supreme Court and presidential candidate, who kindly agreed to being interviewed and offered valuable and excellent advice. Dr Gaviria Díaz reminded Colombians ceaselessly throughout his presidential campaign in 2006 that ethics and politics should not be antagonistic. Little did I know at that time that Fals-Borda had been the Chief Executive of the political party Dr Gaviria represented.

My thanks go to the staff of the various archives and institutions where I have conducted this research: the Archivo Central e Histórico of the National University in Bogotá, especially to Gabriel Escalante whose kindness and collaboration facilitated my search of information enormously; the Archivo General de la Nación, especially to its Director Dr Mauricio Tovar and Flor Alba; Archive Escuela Superior de Administración Pública, especially to Carmen Cecilia Lagos Caballero and her team for their diligent help; the Library of the Javeriana University, especially to Lucila Herrera, Janneth Londoño and Judith Rodríguez for their readiness to help with my awful lots of requests; the Colombian National Library, the British Library and the Library of Roehampton University, especially to the Interlibrary Loans team and the Humanities librarian. Thanks are due to the Society for Latin American Studies (SLAS) for a travel grant which allowed me a second fieldwork trip to Colombia.

It was my original intention to write this thesis in Spanish, my native tongue, and then to get it translated into English; however, my supervisors encouraged me to do it in the English language. They were convinced I could do it, even when I was not so sure. This

is why special thanks are due to Martin Higgitt, Emily Humphreys and Gill for their help in making the earlier drafts readable. My greatest debt of gratitude is to Gill, a professional and skilful editor, for her dedication to the entire final manuscript. I was exceedingly fortunate that she not only undertook the extremely challenging task of improving the English of a newcomer to the Anglophone world but also got involved in the discussion of the thesis's topics which was a unique opportunity to clarify my ideas and discuss my findings. In spite of Gill's painstaking work and Rolf's help in setting the style sheet, and despite Professor Edwards's and Dr Hamilton's sterling supervisory support, the final draft may still have some shortcomings, either in contents or in form. They are mine.

Finally, I am extremely grateful to my mother, brothers and sisters and their families for their unstinting support since the first time I talked about leaving my job as a lecturer at Javeriana University to come to London to study English in 2009. The whole project would have been impossible to complete without their help. They are a source of happiness and strength for all my endeavours. To Rafita, Tere, Oscar, Amparito, Jorge, Neisy, Carlos Enrique and Julio Cesar thanks for their priceless friendship. And here in the UK to Susan, Geraldine, Martin and Idaly, Allan and Angela, Pete and Gerry for their moral support.

This thesis is in many ways a tribute to my father from whom I received practical lessons on solidarity, tolerance, compassion, ethics and non-dogmatic thinking. This is why this thesis is also dedicated, with my love, to his memory.

Abbreviations

ACH-UN	Archivo Central e Histórico Universidad Nacional de Colombia
AGN	Archivo General de la Nación
AID	Agency for International Development (United States)
ANAPO	Alianza Nacional Popular (National Popular Alliance)
ANDI	Asociación Nacional de Industriales (National Association of Industrialists)
ANUC	Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos (National Association of Peasant Users)
CCPAL	Presbyterian Commission on Cooperation for Latin America
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (United States)
CIDSE	International Alliance of Catholic Development Agencies (Belgium)
CINVA	Centro Interamericano de Vivienda (Inter-American Centre for Housing)
CLACSO	Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (Latin American Association of Social Sciences)
COEMAR	Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations of the Presbyterian Church (United States)
COPAC	Joint Committee for the Promotion of Aid to Cooperatives (United Nations and World Council of Credit Unions)
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)
EPL	Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Army)
ESAP	Escuela Superior de Administración Pública (National School of Public Administration)
FAFS	Fondo Acumulado Facultad de Sociología
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia)
FCTR	Fondo Camilo Torres Restrepo
FOFB	Fondo Orlando Fals Borda
FEDECAFE	Federación Nacional de Cafeteros (National Federation of Coffee Growers)
FERES	Catholic International Federation of Institutes for Social and Socio-Religious Research (Belgium).
FR/RIAS	Fundación Rosca/Rosca de Investigación y Acción Social (Rosca Foundation of Research and Social Action)

FUN	Federación Universitaria Nacional (National Federation of Students)
IAP	Investigación Acción Participación (Participatory Action Research, PAR)
IIES, WGC	Institute for International Economic Studies, Wenner-Gren Centre (Stockholm)
IGGRI	International Group for Grassroots Initiatives
INCORA	Instituto Colombiano de la Reforma Agraria (Colombian Agrarian Reform Institute)
ISA	International Sociological Association
ISS	Protestant Institute of Social Studies (The Hague)
M-19	Movimiento del 19 Abril (de 1970) (Movement of 19 April)
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology (United States)
MOEC	Movimiento Obrero Estudiantil de Colombia (Workers' Student Movement of Colombia)
MOIR	Movimiento Obrero Independiente y Revolucionario (Workers' Independent and Revolutionary Movement)
MRL	Movimiento Revolucionario Liberal (Revolutionary Liberal Movement)
NCSDP	National Committee on Development of the Presbyterian Church (United States)
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PCC	Partido Comunista Colombiano
PHS	Presbyterian Historical Society of the United Presbyterian Church (United States)
PLEDES	Programa Latinoamericano de Estudios del Desarrollo
PYC	Presbyterian Youth Centre (Barranquilla, Colombia)
RTVC	Radio y Televisión de Colombia
SAREC	Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (Stockholm)
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
STACA	Servicio Técnico Agrícola Colombiano Americano (Colombian American Agrarian Service)
UPC	United Presbyterian Church (United States)
UPTC	Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
UTC	Unión de Trabajadores de Colombia (Union of Colombian Workers)
WCC	World Council of Churches (Geneva)
WCCA	World Council of Churches Archives (Geneva)

FOREWORD

This thesis looks at the intellectual history of sociologist Orlando Fals-Borda between 1948 and 1974, in the light of present concerns; that is, the seemingly overwhelming odds against establishing peace after nearly six decades of uninterrupted conflict in Colombia.

This research was carried out during the same four years, 2012–2016, that peace talks were held between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). By a remarkable coincidence, this thesis was finalised in the same month as agreement was reached between the government and the FARC (26 September 2016). However, only six days later, on 2 October 2016 a national referendum unexpectedly rejected the peace agreement by the narrowest of margins: a difference of just 53,894 votes (0.43%) of the 13 million people (37%) who voted. Notwithstanding this popular rejection of the signed agreement, on 7 October 2016, President Juan Manuel Santos won the Nobel Peace Prize because, according to the Nobel committee ‘Santos has brought the bloody conflict significantly closer to a peaceful solution’. The award is also, in the committee’s view, ‘a tribute to the Colombian people who, despite great hardships and abuses, have not given up hope of a just peace, and to all the parties who have contributed to the peace process’.¹ It is too early for an objective analysis of both the low voter turnout and the future of the peace process; however, three key influences behind the success of the No camp are connected with the issues discussed in this thesis:

¹ The Norwegian Nobel Committee. Oslo 7 October 2016. www.nobelprize.org

1) The use of indignation as a main ideological driver. The No campaign was based on abhorrence at the idea that FARC leaders could be spared prison while seats in Congress were guaranteed to FARC for ten years. If people voted Yes, the leaders of the No campaign assured voters,² they would surrender the country to Communism *Castro-Chavista* (following the examples of Cuba and Venezuela) and give impunity to the perpetrators of violence. Interestingly enough, the victory of the No campaign came just ten years after the main opponent of the 2016 referendum, ex-President Alvaro Uribe, 2002–2010, signed a closed-door agreement of demobilisation with the paramilitary groups. Media reports at the time suggested that over 30,000 trained fighters would go free without trial, although they were considered by both Amnesty International and the UN to have been responsible for 80 per cent of non-combative, politically motivated killings, disappearances, and torture in the last twenty-five years of Colombia's civil conflict.³ However, the fear of Communism is still a powerful element in mobilising the masses in a country where the Communist Party, the Union Patriótica, was decimated over two decades ago, when over 3,500 leaders, including presidential candidates, governors and mayors — democratically elected after having laid aside their arms — were massacred between 1985 and 1992. After this, guerrilla groups, as Eric Hobsbawm pointed out, ‘developed an understandable reluctance to exchange the gun for the ballot-box’.⁴

² Including Conservative Senator Valencia, grand-daughter of ex-President Valencia during whose administration, 1962–1966, the FARC guerrilla movement was created; and the Attorney General who started his political career by burning a pile of ‘immoral’ books. His law dissertation, ‘Foundations of the Catholic State’, was dedicated to the Virgin Mary begging her to restore the Christian order and annihilate Communism in Colombia. See Alejandro Ordoñez, ‘Fundamentos del Estado Católico,’ (Dissertation, Universidad Santo Tomás de Aquino, Bucaramanga, 1979).

³ Amnesty International, ‘Colombia: The Paramilitaries in Medellín: Demobilization or Legalization?’, August 31, (2005): 3-4; Constanza Vieira, ‘COLOMBIA: International Criminal Court Scrutinises Paramilitary Crimes,’ *International Press Service: News Agency*, 27 August (2008).

⁴ *Interesting Times. A Twentieth-Century Life*. (London: Abacus, 2003), 381.

2) According to the leaders of the No camp, the agreement would threaten family stability and traditional religious values. In May 2016, the Minister of Education presented a Bill for educational reform which was heavily loaded with gender-identity and trans-gender issues in schools. The Bill was met by a nationwide protest which brought together Catholic and Protestant groups. Although the Bill was apparently unrelated to the peace process, the ‘No to gender ideology’ was used to oppose the peace agreement because its article 82 included gender identity issues. Two days before the referendum, the Presidential envoy tried to convince 200 evangelical pastors that the peace process was not led by gender ideology (*Revista Semana*, 29 September 2016). Protestants in Colombia have grown from a tiny segregated minority to ten million (almost twenty-five per cent of the total population) in the last fifty years and form a significant and very conservative target group in any political campaign. After the referendum a large number of religious groups celebrated not only the No victory but also the Minister of Education’s resignation. It has become apparent that many Colombians fear secularisation more than they fear the oldest, biggest and best organised guerrilla group in the Continent.

3) The referendum turnout showed that the average city-dwelling Colombian is blind to the suffering of the war-ravaged country-dwellers. The day before the referendum, Jonathan Powell, the British civil servant who led the Good Friday peace talks in Northern Ireland and advised Colombia on its peace process, declared: ‘I don’t think there is a Plan B. If the accord is voted down, the country will plunge into uncertainty’ (*Financial Times*, 1 October 2016). But enthusiastic celebrations by city-dwellers after the No victory reflected the failure, even after Powell’s warning, to hear the cries of help from the rural victims and the desperation of seven million people uprooted during the last five decades of conflict.

Against this background, Fals-Borda's ethics and critique of ideology can be better appreciated for three reasons. First, Fals-Borda, a Presbyterian himself, discussed the ethical dimension of social change without moralising. Second, he analysed the ideological element of political violence in relation to both socio-economic conditions and non-rational and emotional elements that have allowed hatred and fear to become crucial elements of politics in Colombia for so long. Last but not least, as a practical and experienced researcher who lived and worked in the countryside with the Colombian peasants, Fals-Borda's intellectual career cannot be detached from his lifelong commitment to improve the fate of the peasantry.

INTRODUCTION

In May 1959, the Liberal ex-President Alfonso López Pumarejo was awarded a doctorate *honoris causa* by the National University of Colombia. The ceremony was conspicuously attended by his sworn political adversary, the Conservative leader, Laureano Gómez. In his speech, López Pumarejo talked of those times when the Conservatives ‘practised a barbaric and ferocious sort of opposition’. In a clear allusion to Laureano Gómez, he carried on: ‘Those who frown at any sort of dissent today once preached that the [Liberal] Republic [1930–1946] must be made unliveable. They ordered the use of any means necessary, of assaults on individuals, of intrepid action. In short they advocated the sort of violence that later left its vile mark on our political life, penetrating the lowest levels of society. That Violence did not originate among people, but that in philosophy and practice it came from on high.’¹ López Pumarejo was referring to the years of *la Violencia*, the darkest period of twentieth century Colombia, 1948–1958, during which the death toll rose to 200,000.

Henderson, who documented this event in the epilogue to his biography of Laureano Gómez, did not bring it up to discuss Pumarejo’s charge that it was Laureano Gómez who was chiefly responsible for the previous twenty years of violence and political turmoil. For Henderson it was ‘beyond doubt that Colombia’s political militants, Gómez foremost among them, touched off the tragic civil conflict’.² What really interested

¹ Alfonso López Pumarejo, speech on receiving a doctorate *honoris causa* at the National University of Colombia, Bogotá, May 1962. In James Henderson, *Modernisation in Colombia: The Laureano Gómez years, 1889-1965* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 418.

² Henderson, *Modernization*, 420.

Henderson was Gómez's imperturbable countenance after López's attacking him personally: 'Gómez rose, reached out and pulled López around to face him ... [Gómez] smiled, shook López's hand and returned to his seat.'³ For Henderson this was far from being an act of reconciliation; it was simply the act of a victor congratulating an opponent whom he had bested. 'Laureano Gómez,' his biographer said, 'could afford that statesmanlike gesture ... at that moment he was largely satisfied with the way history had unfolded.'⁴ Indeed, after a self-exile in Spain following the coup organised by his own party in 1953, Gómez, by negotiating with the majority Liberals a two-party coalition in 1957, had taken up the reins of his party again; he had humiliated his own Conservative enemies and guaranteed for his party two presidencies and equal sharing of political spoils over the next sixteen years, 1958–1974.

López, whose resignation from his second presidency in 1945 was preceded by a fierce campaign led by Laureano Gómez to discredit his government, had reasons to be at least partially satisfied too in 1959. His idea of a politics of coalition presented in 1945 became true in 1958; his party, despite the persecution during *la Violencia*, remained the majority and was in commanding position in the new power-sharing agreement. Additionally, whilst López's biographers did not desist from magnifying the modest achievements of his first government of Revolution in March, 1934–1938, the writing about Laureano Gómez, except for Henderson's biography, had been the task of Gómez's political enemies.

This history of the López–Gómez friendship in the 1920s, bitter antagonism from the mid-1930s onwards (with its far-reaching consequences for the history of Colombia) and decisive cooperation in the establishment of the coalition rule in 1958 has little to

³ Henderson, *Modernisation*, 420.

⁴ Henderson, *Modernisation*, 420.

do with personal circumstances and much more with one the most distinctive aspects of Colombian politics: the overwhelming dominance of the two traditional parties, the Liberal and the Conservative, over political and public life. As Helen Delpar pointed out, ‘in 1979 Colombia was the only Latin American country whose political system was dominated by two political parties that could trace their origin to the mid-nineteenth century. Elsewhere the political parties born in that era had either disappeared, as in Brazil, or had been reduced to insignificance, as appeared to be the case in Uruguay.’⁵ Against this background, Jonathan Hartlyn explained Colombia’s lack of populism, radical parties and brutal military regimes as a concomitant of the primacy of the two-party system.⁶

In 1986, aiming to explain the Colombian socio-political scenario, which did not fit with the picture of the Latin American subcontinent ruled by military governments after the mid-twentieth century, Robert Dix wrote: ‘Colombia is a paradox, difficult to classify and generally lacking in the kind of political innovations that tend to attract the foreign or comparative scholar, or the foreign press.’⁷ Focused on providing a contrast, Dix to some extent underplayed those close connections between patron-client based politics and Colombia’s political violence that scholars such as Wilde, Berry, Cardoso and Faletto had already pointed out in the 1970s.⁸ Despite its serious epistemological limitations, the paradox-centred approach rapidly gained popularity after it was

⁵ Delpar, *Red against Blue* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1981), ix.

⁶ For the historical antecedents of conflict regulation through consociational practices in Colombia see Jonathan Hartlyn, *The Politics of Coalition Rule in Colombia* (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 20-53.

⁷ Dix, *The Politics of Colombia* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1986), 2. By the same token, David Bushnell observed: ‘After all, what is a Latin Americanist to do with a country where military dictators are almost unknown, the political left has been congenitally weak, and such phenomena as urbanization and industrialization never spawned a “populist” movement of lasting consequences?’ *The Making of Colombia: A Nation in spite of Itself* (California: University of California Press, 1993), viii.

⁸ Albert Berry, ‘Some implications of elitist rule for development in Colombia’ (1971); Fernando Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependencia y Desarrollo en América Latina* (1977); Alexander Wilde, ‘Conversations among gentlemen: Oligarchical democracy in Colombia’ (1978).

introduced in the report of the Commission of Studies of Violence in Colombia (1987) as the means to explain the long history and complexity of the violence in Colombia despite its long stable tradition of democratic governments, as will be discussed in the closing chapter.⁹

Fals-Borda: ethics and subversion

The historical context of this thesis covers two periods: *la Violencia*, 1949-1958 (a period about which memories and information are blurred and difficult to unearth), and the beginning of the revolutionary war in Colombia in the 1960s until mid-1970s. Studies on the period researched here have been greatly outnumbered by studies concentrated on the Colombian conflict from the 1980s onwards. One reason seems to be the urgent need to deal with the present, leading to the past being overlooked. In contrast to *la Violencia*, a national conflict that had practically no bearing on international affairs, the complex entanglement between armed groups and narcotics trafficking in the 1980s, not only made the country internationally notorious but also resulted in a dramatic escalation of the conflict during the last quarter of the twentieth century, with serious global implications. In contrast with a large proportion of studies which date the beginning of the current conflict in the mid-1960s, this research analyses links between the origins of revolutionary armed struggle in the mid-1960s with their immediate historical backdrop: *la Violencia*.

This historical context also comprises three periods of Orlando Fals-Borda's intellectual career: his postgraduate formation, 1949-1955, his early career, 1955-1969, and his

⁹ Comisión de Estudios sobre la Violencia, *Colombia: Violencia y Democracia* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Colciencias, 1987), 33.

opposition to the traditional leadership class by civil resistance as an independent researcher and political activist, 1970-1974. As a rural sociologist and co-author of the first study of *la Violencia* (1962), Fals-Borda was far from seeing the political violence in Colombia as a paradox. He was aware that *la Violencia* happened not in spite of, but because of, the elite that returned to power in 1958. Moreover, he was concerned about the socio-political disadvantages of top down reconciliation which did not permeate or benefit the social bases that had suffered the devastation during the 1950s. By the late 1960s, it was clear that his principles and motivations were in conflict with the political agenda of the 'satisfied' architects of the new power-sharing agreement, the National Front.

Despite his early successful career as a member of the establishment (founder of the first Latin American Faculty of Sociology in Colombia in 1959, Vice-Minister of Agriculture, 1959-1960, and Programme Director of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development in Latin America, 1968-1970), Fals-Borda distanced himself from this to join the peasant movement's struggle for land in 1971. Fals-Borda called this period, 1970-1975, the 'iconoclastic' and 'anti-intellectual' stage of his career: a period characterized by his refusal to side with institutions committed to developmental policies. In April 1970, Fals-Borda was invited to be part of 'a select group of international leaders to meet privately with United Nations General Secretary U Thant to consider ways of improving the United Nations during the next decade'.¹⁰ Fals-Borda argued that the main reason to decline this invitation was his determination to return to Colombia to contribute, as he wrote: 'to the liberating effort necessary to make [the] country a better place for its people, and to its search for autonomy and

¹⁰ Consultative Conference on the Future of the United Nations. The invitation telegram stated: 'We have the honour to invite you to New York for this purpose May 25 through 28 1970.' Archivo Central e Histórico, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Fondo Orlando Fals-Borda (ACH-UN, FOFB). Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_179.

dignity; a task of [his] highest priority.’¹¹ But he also took opportunity to criticise the United Nations’ policy of palliatives, called ‘reformism’, and the elitist nature of the meeting, which in Fals-Borda’s view, did not take in consideration ‘diverse ideological tendencies interested in economic development problems and social change’.¹² This letter was highly controversial.¹³ However, looking back later at the radicalism of those years, Fals-Borda himself interpreted it as a key moment in his career: ‘If we had wavered in our task, it would have been tantamount to surrender to old vested interests that were finding a way to blunt our initial concerned drives.’¹⁴

In fact, in many ways Fals-Borda was, at the beginning of his career, an outsider: the Caribbean milieu (more cosmopolitan, tolerant and also much less influenced by Hispanic traditionalism); he was member of a generation of *costeños* (Colombian Caribbean) who distanced themselves from the intellectual and cultural tutelage of the *bogotano* elite; he was educated in the American School and belonged to the Presbyterian Church in a time when Protestantism was considered as a different (and foreign) religion.¹⁵

¹¹ Fals-Borda, ‘Letter of Motives.’ Geneva 12 May 1970. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_83.

¹² Fals-Borda, ‘Letter of Motives.’ Geneva 12 May 1970. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_81-83

¹³ Erich Jacoby, Institute for International Economic Studies, Wenner-Gren Center, Stockholm, wrote: ‘Dear Orlando, I wish to congratulate you on this brilliant letter which gives the right reply to a doubtful invitation to participate in a useless effort. With a few exceptions the composition of this committee is almost ridiculous and certainly you do not fit into this pattern. Congratulations!’ Letter on 28 May 1970. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_153. Father François Houtart, for his part, thought Fals-Borda’s decision was too precipitated: ‘No sé si este tipo de reacción es totalmente positivo. La admiro mucho por su contenido. El problema es que, si no hay ninguna voz para expresar otra perspectiva que la de McNamara o de Lester Pearson, no sé quién podrá hablar.’ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_Norteamerica_Belgica_06.

¹⁴ Fals-Borda, ‘Notes on the present status of PAR: Paper for internal discussion only,’ (Presented at International Group for Grassroots Initiatives (IGGRI). Meeting, New Delhi, 1 April 1988). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Investigación_Acción_Participativa, sub-folder IAP Otros_Países, Debate Majid Rahnema_003.

¹⁵ He was a member of the Grupo Barranquilla in the American School and the Presbyterian Youth Centre to which also belonged artists and writers such as the painter Alejandro Obregón, the writers Alvaro Cepeda Samudio and Gabriel García Márquez and the musician Luis Biava. See Lola Cendales et al.,

As Fals-Borda himself recalled, his upbringing in the Presbyterian tradition of Knox and Calvin, a tradition to which only a tiny and segregated minority of Colombians belonged, and his education in the Presbyterian school and universities in North America, distanced him from the cultural ethos of the Hispanic tradition.¹⁶ Thus, the encounter with the priest Camilo Torres and then with the theology of liberation elaborated by Catholic and Protestant theologians enabled him to incorporate elements of the Catholic humanism into the bases of his political and professional options in the late 1960s. As the Presbyterian theologian Richard Shaull observed, what captured the imagination of this young generation committed to the struggle of the masses was the humanism embodied in local ideologies: ideologies such as the indigenous Marxism of the Peruvian José Carlos Mariategui and Jorge Eliécer Gaitán's autochthonous socialism.¹⁷ This tradition, that Shaull called 'the traditional humanism of the Iberian soul' — remote not only from international communism but from dogmatic Marxism as well — was a true discovery for Fals-Borda in the mid-1960s; one which he embraced wholeheartedly and consistently for the rest of his life. This helps explain the way Fals-Borda dealt with the questions arising from his mixed cultural background. Educated in the U.S. tradition, where empirical knowledge is normative, he also belonged to the Latin American intellectual milieu, for which 'empirical' was most often a pejorative term.

The early synthesis of the two cultures was not merely a methodical non-conformism. Instead, it was a dynamic interplay between theory and practice resulting in an

'One sows the seed, but it has its own dynamics: An interview with Orlando Fals-Borda,' *International Journal of Action Research* 1, n. 1 (2005): 11.

¹⁶ Fals-Borda, 'Desafíos Socio-Educativos y Culturales para las Instituciones Cristianas (Paper presented at Jornada de Evaluación del Plan de Misión, Sínodo de Colombia, Barranquilla, enero 14-16 2002). In Isay Pérez Benavides, *La Influencia Religiosa en la Conciencia Social de Orlando Fals-Borda* (Barranquilla: Corporación Universitaria Reformada, 2010), 79.

¹⁷ Richard Shaull, *The New revolutionary mood in Latin America* (Pennsylvania: Buck Hill Falls, 1962), 14.

innovative praxis: critical interpretation of the world to transform it with the people (not only for them), and particularly with the destitute. This not only implied struggle for eventual control of power but a series of elements such as: the formation of cadres ethically motivated (counter-elite), diffusion of ideas and knowledge within popular organisations, implementation of new technology, critical recovery of historical memory and the creation of an international network of solidarity. The overall strategy is what Fals-Borda called subversion (see Chapter 5). Later on, Fals-Borda's work with the indigenous and mestizo people of the Atlantic Coast during research for his four-volume *Historia Doble de la Costa* (1978-1986) led him to see in a new light his Caribbean ancestry and incorporate its philosophy of life in his criticism of the socio-political conflict in Colombia. As he wrote:

Mis padres me convirtieron en heredero y transmisor de una fe cristiana caracterizada por la cultura europea y limitada por ella, ampliada a Norte América con la colonización de los peregrinos, y luego a América Latina y otras partes con las misiones nacionales. Siento a veces que ese contexto original euro-norteamericano me ha impedido gozar a fondo y entender a plenitud las implicaciones de aquel otro mundo cultural y espiritual de manera independiente, con su propia inspiración, sabor humano y peso histórico, se había formado en mi tierra natal antes de la llegada de los cristianos, contexto regional del trópico que sigue vivo entre nosotros a pesar de la hecatombe de la Conquista Española.¹⁸

The indigenous element — ‘a view of transcendence at once cosmic and full of feelings, and still alive in the soul of our people’ — would be also integrated by Fals-Borda into his search of an autochthonous socialism as a key element of social awakening and political empowerment. This was conveyed by the indigenous word *Kaziyadu* (to be re-born; renaissance), which Fals-Borda later on incorporated into the vocabulary of his Participatory Action Research.¹⁹

¹⁸ Fals-Borda, *Desafíos Socio-Educativos y Culturales*, 78.

¹⁹ Víctor Manuel Moncayo, introduction to *Una Sociología Sentipensante para América Latina*, by Fals-Borda (Bogotá: CLACSO, 2009), 17.

The thesis's contributions

Having described the task, it is important at this stage to outline how the thesis contributes to the fields it covers: intellectual history and the studies of political violence in Colombia.

First, this thesis presents new information on Fals-Borda's intellectual career between 1948 and 1974. A large number of primary and previously unstudied sources have been tracked down. It is hard to emphasise enough the importance of Fals-Borda's personal correspondence and documents in this study. Therefore, the priority is to let Fals-Borda's own voice be heard and follow the clues provided by the material itself (see below). Based on the analysis of this data, the thesis both sheds light on and challenges commonplaces about this early period of Fals-Borda's career — perhaps the least studied one.

This leads to a second important aspect: the thesis's interdisciplinary approach. A large number of reviews and studies focus on Fals-Borda's authorship of Participatory Action Research (PAR). But the analysis of the historical backdrop as well as of the disciplinary elements underlying Fals-Borda's praxis before PAR have usually been ignored. Existing scholarship, focused on either the pragmatic or theoretical elements of PAR, has paid little attention to its interdisciplinary background. By bringing together sociological, theological and political analysis, this historical research confirms that the study of Fals-Borda's earlier career and his criticism of political violence requires a multi-dimensional approach. This is a *sine qua non* for examining the large number of primary sources used for this research.

Based on this interdisciplinary approach, this research analyses three crucial elements that lay the basis for Fals-Borda's ideology critique of political violence: ethical-

theological principles, historical knowledge of social reality, and the critical role of social sciences in Latin America. Sociology, history and theological reflection were inextricably linked in Fals-Borda's thinking during his early career; however, the analysis of this has been neglected hitherto. This is not to suggest that these are the only aspects that comprise Fals-Borda's critique of ideology. The criterion to focus on these three was triggered by a character in Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*. As George says: 'We must not think of the things we could do with, but only of the things that we can't do without.'²⁰

The third contribution relates to the thesis's theoretical framework: Walter Benjamin's reflections on violence and history. His examination of violence provides this research with the criteria to approach the ethical question underlying Fals-Borda's seminal analysis of *la Violencia*. On the other hand, Walter Benjamin's materialist historiography is vital to the interpretation of the dialectical basis of Fals-Borda's ethical-theological, historical and epistemological criticism. This philosophical framework makes it possible to carry out a criticism of the phenomenon of the violence through the analysis of the thinking and praxis of one of its critics.

The reference to Walter Benjamin, as already mentioned, is not marginal. On the contrary, Benjamin's critical approach to violence in both the liberal state and the expansion of the capitalist system informs the development of the topics addressed in this thesis. That is why, last but not least, a fourth contribution is made to Benjamin studies; in particular, the way this research finds out, to put it in Benjamin's words, elective affinities between his criticism and that of a Latin American social thinker, as will be explained further down.

²⁰Jerome K. Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2001), 21.

The Framework: from criticism to ideological critique

The theoretical and epistemological structure around which this thesis is built is Walter Benjamin's 'Critique of the Violence' (1921) and 'Theses on the Concept of History' (1940). Indeed, the project of recovering ignored and forgotten fragments of critical thought through which the political violence in Colombia could be analysed was inspired by the combined analysis of Benjamin's 'Critique' and 'Theses'. Preventing these fragments from sinking into oblivion is in itself an act of criticism; however, the next level of the critique is to investigate the reasons for their silence and seize their content as testimonies of historical consciousness. Thus, re-constructing the context to which these fragments belonged proves essential to understanding their critical meaning. That is why this dissertation follows as far as possible a chronological narrative structure. In so doing, the main criterion is to let the primary sources speak and find the various ways in which the data connected to each other and related to the historical context. According to Benjamin, the critique of violence is 'the philosophy of its history — the "philosophy" of this history because the idea of its development makes possible a critical, discriminating and decisive approach to its temporal data'.²¹ The closing chapter will dig deeper into this aspect.

At this point, what is important is to mention those aspects of Benjamin's 'Critique' and 'Theses' within which this research is framed. First, the definition of the task of a critique of the violence: 'A cause, however effective,' Benjamin says, 'becomes violent, in the precise sense of the word, only when it enters into moral relations. The sphere of these relations is defined by the concepts of law and justice.'²² The task of a critique is to establish the basis upon which to distinguish between violence which is state-

²¹ Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of the Violence,' in Vol. 1 of *Selected Writings 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), 251.

²² Benjamin, 'Critique,' 236.

sanctioned and violence which is not, and the relation of each one with the realm of justice. Since the mere description of historical conditions cannot be admitted as a bottom line explanation for violence, the role of historical analysis of violence is to answer the question: what legal conditions are established in a particular historical context? And subsequently, to analyse the ethical/moral meaning of such conditions.

For Benjamin the ideological justification of violence has to do much more with its claims to legality and legitimacy than with rhetorical mechanisms. Thus, the difference in the notions of legality and justice of both natural and positive law are at the core of the problem. Natural law sees violence as a product of nature, totally justified in order to attain just ends whilst the positive law theory regards violence as a historical product. By differentiating between sanctioned and non-sanctioned, positive law also makes possible a distinction between legal ends and natural ends, which provides an initial criterion to assess the legality of violence.

However, the persistence of non-sanctioned violence in liberal institutions rendered Benjamin's critical project untenable in its most rigorous assumptions: its attempt to separate categories of legitimate power from sheer force since it is power, not justice, that is guaranteed by all law-making violence. As Jacques Derrida points out, Benjamin shows the inherent contradiction of traditional philosophical interdependence of law and justice: 'it turns out that law claims to exercise itself in the name of justice and that justice demands for itself that it be established in the name of law that must be put to work (constituted and applied) by force, enforced.'²³ Then Benjamin's critique squarely

²³ Jacques Derrida, 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority",' in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, et al. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 16; 23.

fits in an anti-liberal tradition that does not shun force to achieve its transformative socio-political agenda.²⁴

‘Theses’, conceived after Benjamin embraced the Marxist tradition of ideology critique, brings about the historical–materialist element to this framework.²⁵ Thus, it is crucial to an understanding of the role of theology, philosophy of history and theory of knowledge in critically interpreting the historical conditions of the violence as well as in constructing and sustaining an emancipatory praxis. The focus of criticism is then the narrative of historical progress of the liberal theory of the state — the inextricable connection between mythic violence and the mythic conception of time embodied in the idea of historical progress. Although the ‘Theses’ are not intended to be a prophecy of annihilation, they call for a ‘real state of emergency’. Unlike Marx’s conception of revolution as the ‘locomotive of world history’, Benjamin’s state of emergency, in the throes of the fascist threat, seems more to do with bringing about ‘the messianic power of political action’ and raising awareness of the necessity ‘to activate the emergency brakes’ (Thesis XVIIa). For the dialectical historian this is not so much a problem of method as of epistemology. As Habermas states, ‘the historian who practices empathy and comprehends everything assembles a mass of facts, which means that he places the objectified course of history into an ideal simultaneity in order to fill up “empty and homogenous time”’. He thereby strips the present’s relationship to the future of any relevance for understanding the past.’²⁶ On the contrary, Benjamin’s task of brushing ‘history against the grain’ (Thesis VII) depends on the answer to the question: with

²⁴ Cfr. Beatrice Hansenn, *Critique of violence: Between Poststructuralism and Critical Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 3.

²⁵ Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Concept of History,’ in Vol. 4 of *Selected Writings 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 389-409. Cited in-text as (Thesis, number).

²⁶ Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1990), 13.

whom does the historian actually sympathise? Then, solidarity with the victims is nothing less than an epistemological principle of dialectical historiography.

Method and sources

This research started with a period of analysis of relevant theory and bibliography vis-à-vis the three aspects which form the basis of this project: the history of the socio-political conflict in Colombia, the published works of Fals-Borda, and Walter Benjamin's reflections on violence and philosophy of history. It included also two fieldwork trips to Colombia to collect material from archives.

The main sources of information — in addition to his published works — are Fals-Borda's, letters, personal notebooks, documents, drafts with handwritten comments and unpublished writings obtained from three collections held at the Central and Historical Archive of the National University, Bogotá, Colombia: The Fondo Orlando Fals-Borda, the Fondo Acumulado Facultad de Sociología and the Fondo Camilo Torres Restrepo.

The Fondo Orlando Fals-Borda (FOFB), already digitally conserved, is an impressive and vast collection of documents donated by Fals-Borda himself. Although the information with regard to the period 1948-1974 is abundant (4417 documents were checked), it still constitutes a minor section of the whole collection. The bulk of the collection comprises documents dated 1977 onwards, the year after which Fals-Borda threw himself into the two-fold task of consolidating Action-Research as a method of knowledge and political participation (later known as PAR), and fostering the creation of a national and international network of grassroots movements.

The Fondo Acumulado Facultad de Sociología (FAFS), the academic and administrative archive of the Faculty of Sociology of the National University, provided invaluable data about Fals-Borda's work as Dean of this institution from 1959 to 1966. More than 3200 documents, from 92 folders in 24 boxes, were checked.²⁷

Data were also obtained from three other archives. First, the National General Archive, particularly the Camilo Torres collection, which contains a few documents relating to Fals-Borda. This Archive was initially consulted in search of official documents — the absence of which is the most conspicuous gap in the research on *la Violencia*. One of the documents found explained why. It was the decree which ordered the destruction of 79 sacks containing the documents of the government's Ministry of Internal Affairs between 1949 and 1958.²⁸ Second, the Archive of the Presbyterian Historical Society of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S. which contains valuable information about the controversy between the Presbyterian Synod of Colombia and Fals-Borda, and also the letters and documents of Richard Shaull and John Sinclair. Third, documents of the World Conference on Church and Society, 1966, from the Archive of the World Council of Churches in Geneva.

For the analysis of the historical period 1948–1974 primary documents were contrasted and interpreted in conjunction with textual analysis of a great many secondary sources. Additionally, other sources such as audios of speeches available at the National Library and the Archive Señal Memoria of Radio y Television de Colombia (RTVC) were

²⁷ The documents are not available in digital version, and most of them have not been catalogued so the number given to the documents here is in accord with their order in their respective folders.

²⁸ Acta Número 1 Del Comité de Archivo y Correspondencia Ministerio de Gobierno, 04 enero 1967, in Archivo General de la Nación (AGN).

perused or listened to. Five personal interviews were conducted in Colombia (see acknowledgements).

Finally, it remains to be added that the author tried, unsuccessfully, to obtain access to an important source of information. This was Guzmán's personal archive. Monsignor Germán Guzmán was one of the eight members of the National Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Present Situation of *la Violencia* in the National Territory, created by the interim government in 1958; he was the only member who kept records of interviews and local agreements.²⁹ As will be explained in chapter 2, Guzmán's archive was the main source of information for *La Violencia en Colombia* (1962). In 1969, Stanley Ross, Director of the Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, wrote to Fals-Borda, co-author of the book, to ask his opinion about his Institute's intention to acquire the collection, which Guzmán had taken with him to Mexico. Fals-Borda disapproved of the idea. As he wrote: 'I regret to tell you that I do not agree with such a sale. Ever since I cooperated with Guzmán on our book on *la Violencia*, I have insisted with him to deposit the valuable materials in respectable Colombian institutions, where they should be logically located. I believe it most unfortunate that he is attempting to sell those papers to foreign institutions and I will tell him so when I see him next month in Mexico.'³⁰ In spite of Fals-Borda's efforts, the archive is still in private hands in Mexico, and unavailable.

²⁹ Formed by eight members: two Liberals, two Conservatives, two military officers and two clergymen, the commission interviewed more than 20,000 people in more than fifty-four areas in the country and established fifty local pacts with groups still armed on behalf the government. Since the commissioners were instructed to present their findings and recommendations privately to the president, there were no written reports. Jefferson Jaramillo Marín, 'La Comisión Investigadora de 1958 y la Violencia en Colombia,' *Universitas Humanistica*, no. 72 (2011): 37-62.

³⁰ Letter to Stanley Ross, Director Institute of Latin American Studies, The University of Texas at Austin, on 30 October 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, Sub-folder Europa II_Suiza_31.

The thesis structure

Chapter 1 looks at the making of an intellectual. Due perhaps to the critics', as well as Fals-Borda's own, criticism of his 'functionalist years', the earliest period of his academic career, 1949-1959, has been neglected by earlier researchers and historians. Contrary to the commonplace assumption that Fals-Borda's critical thinking began with his *Subversion and Social Change* (1967), this research examines the earlier years in search of the foundations underlying Fals-Borda's ideology critique of the violence in Colombia. This chapter also considers Fals-Borda's motivations for becoming a rural sociologist and his first jobs. Additionally, it identifies three elements that would remain critically important to his work throughout his life: namely, his ethical-theological values, his historical appreciation of social reality and his criticism of the socio-political role of social sciences in Latin America. These three aspects, analysed in depth in chapters 4 to 6, are key elements to this thesis and its approach to Fals-Borda's critique.

The analysis of Fals-Borda's approach to the moral crisis of the phenomenon known as *la Violencia* makes up the bulk of Chapter 2. In 1959, the 34-year-old Fals-Borda, with the decisive collaboration of Camilo Torres, who was 30 years old, founded the first Faculty of Sociology in Latin America. Soon after its creation, this faculty, as most programmes of sociology created across Latin America during the early 1960s, became integral to the implementation of the U.S. developmental policy for Latin America. Despite the Alliance for Progress's socio-economic agenda, Fals-Borda and Torres were convinced that an adequate response to the social crisis in Colombia had to consider the deep axiological and social crisis that lay buried in the country's most recent past. As Fals-Borda pointed out, the dramatic years of *la Violencia* not only eliminated traditional normativity based on religious principles but also brought up a partial collapse of political legitimacy of the state institutions. This chapter also contrasts

Fals-Borda's approach with both a great many secondary sources and the report of the *Comisión Histórica del Conflicto y sus Víctimas* (CHCV) (2015).

Chapter 3 concentrates on the political debate following the publication of *La Violencia en Colombia* (LVC) (1962), coordinated and co-authored by Fals-Borda. LVC was the first socio-historical analysis of *la Violencia* and the only one for almost two decades. In the face of the return to power of the instigators of *la Violencia* after a new power-sharing agreement, the authors of LVC expected their study to be met with a barrage of criticism; however, they did not anticipate the vicious attacks to which both the book and the authors were subjected. After a decade of cruel and sterile conflict, and physical and psychological exhaustion, Colombia was fertile ground for narratives of exclusion and oblivion. This chapter analyses the impact of LVC and the coordinated campaign to silence this daring book.

'Crisis' and 'critique' are perhaps the concepts that portray best the ideological atmosphere within which Fals-Borda, together with most intellectuals of his generation, was immersed at the end of the 1960s. The strong correlation between crisis and critique is not merely etymological; both concepts are integral to any historical phenomenon understood as a dialectic process.³¹ Denis Goulet defined the late 1960s as the period when a large number of Latin American intellectuals fought their battles around 'conflicting loyalties'.³² Similarly, Fals-Borda faced three crucial options: 'that of the

³¹ The Greek term *kri-tik* (from *krinein*) 'to separate, choose, select, decide, distinguish, sieve'. (Etymological Dictionary of Greek, Brill, 2010. Critic: 'one who passes censure'; 'judge, rel. to crisis relating to a crisis, fault-finding; skilful in judgement.' (The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, 1969) Crisis, latinised form of Greek 'krisis': 'turning point in a disease' (used as such by Hippocrates and Galen), literally 'judgment, result of a trial, selection,' from *krinein* 'to separate, decide, judge'. According to Aristotle's *De Anima*, the term *kri-tik* has had two acceptable meanings: firstly, in the sense of to discriminate or discern, and secondly in that of to judge or decide. LOEB Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Bilingual edition: 151, accessed 12 February 2016. https://www.loebclassics.com/view/aristotle-soul/1957/pb_LCL288.151.xml.

³² Denis Goulet, *A New Moral Order: Studies in Development Ethics and Liberation Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1974), 51.

detached scholar versus the active revolutionary intellectual; that of the institutionally successful professional versus the marginalised outcast; that of the “marker of history” versus the Christian witness to transcendence.’³³ Goulet’s idea of conflicting loyalties, though, has little to do with a ‘moral dilemma’. It suggests that Fals-Borda’s critique of the political violence in Colombia was not merely intellectual but a comprehensive process. The present research has singled out three key elements of this process: ethical-theological reflection, ideological commitment and epistemological validation. This is what chapters 4, 5 and 6 analyse.

Chapter 4 looks at the most neglected aspect of Fals-Borda’s intellectual career: the theological basis of his criticism. By and large, it has been accepted that his Presbyterian upbringing and education, and his relationship with Camilo Torres, influenced both his ethical stances and his personal values. However, to what extent such a religious background influenced his intellectual career and political activism has remained unexplored. This chapter poses the question and also provides answers to it: by analysing Fals-Borda’s involvement in the Latin American Commission on Church and Society, his membership of the Presbyterian Church in Colombia, and his participation in the World Conference of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, 1966 (which preparatory sessions ran parallel with the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church). Finally, this chapter looks at the atmosphere of ecumenism and cross-fertilisation between theology and sociology in Latin America in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Chapter 5 examines the historical and ideological foundations of Fals-Borda’s ideology critique. His criticism never hid its ideological basis. Based on Torres’s utopianism,

³³ Goulet, *A New Moral Order*, 53.

Fals-Borda opposed the ideological justifications of the status quo with his notion of *teletic* subversion — a morally legitimate form of political action.³⁴ As this chapter argues, *Subversion and Social Change in Colombia* (1967) was much more than a provocative intellectual exercise, as some of its critics describe it. Subversion was not only the topic of a particular book but the framework within which he brought together a critical reading of the past and a utopian outlook for the future. Subversion was a complex interplay between ideology, historical dialectic and political action. This explains why Fals-Borda did not fit any of the traditional or newly imported ideological cadres of the political struggle in the late 1960s.

Chapter 6 analyses Fals-Borda's epistemological journey between 1969 and 1974. This chapter takes issue with three common assumptions about Fals-Borda's career during this period, namely, his involvement with the beginnings of the Rosca Foundation, his alleged abandonment of scholarship to join the peasant movement, and the development of the theoretical foundations of Participatory Action Research (PAR). Against the backdrop of his commitment to the peasantry's struggle for land in the western savannahs of the Atlantic Coast in the early 1970s, this chapter concludes that two features made Fals-Borda's definition of 'participation' one of the foundations of his ideology critique: the role this concept played in the thorough process of epistemological validation of his method and also the ontological re-definition of 'participation' — from which he claimed PAR was not merely a method of social research but also a philosophy of life.

The closing chapter addresses the main contributions of Fals-Borda's analysis of *la Violencia* and draws together the elements of his ideology critique outlined in chapters 4

³⁴ From the Greek 'telos': 'end, purpose or goal'. It is root of the term 'teleology'. See Chapter 5.

to 6, which highlights the affinities between the framework (Benjamin's Critique and Theses) and the content of this research.

Fals-Borda and the Philistine

There is after all perhaps a more intimate and subtle affinity between Benjamin and Fals-Borda, which runs through this dissertation. In an early article published pseudonymously, Benjamin wrote: 'In our struggle for responsibility, we fight against someone who is masked. The mask of the adult is called "experience." The adult has always already experienced everything ... It was all illusion. — Often we feel intimidated or embittered. Perhaps he is right. What can our retort be? We have not yet experienced anything.' The years of youth, a brief night, will be followed by 'grand experience': the years of compromise, impoverishment of ideas and lack of energy. Such is life. Benjamin's article is an attempt to lift the mask — 'What has this adult experienced?' 'This', he answered, 'the meaninglessness of life. Its brutality.' Herein lies the secret, Benjamin said: 'because he never raises his eyes to the great and the meaningful, the philistine has taken experience as his gospel ... He has never grasped that there is something other than experience, that there are values — inexperienceable — which we serve.' The philistine is satisfied with error: 'You will never find the truth!' he exclaims to the researcher. That is the philistine's experience. For the researcher, however, 'error is only an aid to truth (Spinoza). Only to the mindless is experience devoid of meaning and spirit. To the one who strives, experience may be painful, but it will scarcely lead him to despair'.³⁵

³⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'Experience,' 1913, in Vol. 1 of *Selected Writings 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), 3-4.

This research looks at a period during which Fals-Borda had more questions than answers — his lack of experience put him in the path of vital process of research and the seeking of meaning. The analysis of the elements of which Fals-Borda's critique consist is much more an account of this journey rather than a summary of his findings. Looking retrospectively at this period, Fals-Borda interpreted his own struggle in the following terms: 'My permanent criticism was about the dogmatic and sectarian style of both the Right and the Left in Colombia. That was my criticism of the Marxist parties. That is why I was both accused of being an agent of the CIA and attacked for being a Communist. This goes to show that I was, and still am, a critical intellectual of both the Right and the Left.'³⁶ Hence, what Fals-Borda's intellectual and political experience demonstrated — amidst a society in the travail of unprecedented social change — was that there was no 'only way' to be a revolutionary.

³⁶ Fals-Borda, 'Dogmas No: Interview to Fals-Borda.' *Revista Cromos*, No. 3817/18 (1991): 16.

Chapter One

The Making of an Intellectual, 1948–1958

The decade 1948–1958 influenced Fals-Borda's later career much more than his critics have recognised so far. Perhaps Fals-Borda's self-criticism of his early functional-structuralism may help explain why very little attention has been paid to this period. As Fals-Borda wrote to James J. Lamb on 16 May 1969: 'Dear Jim: I have been trying to disattach [*sic*] myself from portions of the North American heritage which I had received, and with which I find myself increasingly at odds.'¹ Chapter 6 deals with this topic in more depth.

What portions and to what extent he wanted to detach himself from them is a question that Fals-Borda's critics have not examined thoroughly. The lack of interest in Fals-Borda's 'functionalist years' has resulted in oversimplifications of crucial years of his intellectual formation. This can be observed in a number of analyses which divide Fals-Borda's career into clear-cut sequential stages. Javier Guerrero and Bárbara García, for instance, divided Fals-Borda's career chronologically into five well differentiated

¹ James J. Lamb had invited Fals-Borda to be part of the Board of Trustees of the Centre for the Study of Development and Social Change, Massachusetts, USA. As the letter goes on, Fals-Borda explained that: 'For this reason I cannot identify myself with any institution of the United States that would uphold or sustain the present economic and social policies pursued toward the nations of the Third World ... Centers such as yours could be or become nuclei for necessary internal change in your society. Of course this may imply working against the status quo ... If there is in your Center an appropriate response to that urge, then I can accept with good conscience the nomination to your Board, and I will be pleased and honored to participate in your meetings. Judging from your performance in the past, I want to think that this is possible, and that your commitment to change inside the USA is likewise shared by other institutions connected to you.' Letter from Fals-Borda on 16 May 1969. Archivo Central e Histórico, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Fondo Orlando Fals-Borda (ACH-UN, FOFB). Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_05.

stages.² So did the Explanatory Memorandum accompanying the request from the School of Social Science to the Academic and Directive Boards of the Pedagogic University asking them to consider granting an *Honoris Causa* Doctorate to Fals-Borda in 2002.³ Gonzalo Cataño, however, suggested three phases.⁴ Melciades Vizcaino, eager to ‘demonstrate Fals-Borda’s professional and intellectual transformation’ used three rather general labels.⁵ And Pereira Fernandez adopted a ‘before and after’ Fals-Borda’s commitment to theories of modernisation and US developmental policies. As Pereira argues, ‘[Fals-Borda] gradually abandoned those approaches and began a new intellectual career marked by an autonomous and politically radical perspective.’⁶

Deeper discussion of such divisions not only falls outside the scope of this chapter but would also be a major undertaking, which may not necessarily shed new light.

Therefore, this thesis departs from those attempts that focused on ‘clear-cut divisions’, or ‘new beginnings’. This does not mean that the opposite — a simplistic continuity —

² 1) La fundamentación teórica, 1953–1962; 2) La ruptura de los paradigmas positivistas, 1962–1968; 3) De la conciencia transformadora al compromiso revolucionario 1968–1978; 4) La IAP y la ciencia al servicio del cambio y la emancipación de los sujetos investigados: 1978–1991; 5) La revolución democrática y reordenamiento de la nación de 1991 hasta hoy. Javier Guerrero and Bárbara García, ‘Las Ciencias Sociales y la Invención del Tercer Mundo: A Propósito de la Obra Académica de Orlando Fals-Borda.’ *Revista Historia de la Educación Latinoamericana Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia*, vol. 12 (2009): 42–61.

³ The distinction was granted in 2002. ‘Memorándum.’ *Revista Historia de la Educación Latinoamericana Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia* (UPTC), vol. 12 (2009): 77.

⁴ ‘La primera, que cubre los años cincuenta y el lustro inicial de la década de los sesenta, está vinculada con sus estudios de sociología en Estados Unidos y con la creación de la Facultad de Sociología ... La segunda, la “sociología comprometida”, que le ocupó los últimos años de la década de los sesenta y los primeros años de los setenta. Esta segunda etapa se inició con *La subversión en Colombia, visión del cambio social en la historia* (1967). La tercera etapa, que comenzó en los años setenta y se prolongó hasta el final de sus días, estuvo colmada de experiencias políticas y logros intelectuales que ratifican su inquebrantable pasión por la investigación y el compromiso social.’ Gonzalo Cataño, ‘Ciencia y Compromiso,’ *Revista de Economía institucional Universidad Externado De Colombia*, vol. 10, no. 19 (2008): 79–98.

⁵ 1) De la realidad a la utopía; 2) La sociología y la realidad sociopolítica colombiana; 3) Investigaciones y vida individual, familiar y política. Melciades Vizcaino, ‘De la realidad a la utopía: una incursión por las vida y obra de Orlando Fals-Borda.’ *Cuaderno Venezolano de Sociología*, vol. 17, no. 4 (2008): 569–594. First part of this article also published in Vizcaino, ‘Bibliografía de Orlando Fals-Borda,’ in *Sociología y Compromiso: en torno a la obra de Orlando Fals-Borda*, ed. Gonzalo Cataño et al. (Bogotá: Asociación Colombiana de Sociología, 1987), 71–82.

⁶ Alexander Pereira, ‘Fals Borda: La Formación de un Intelectual Disórgano.’ *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura*, no. 35 (2008): 377.

will be suggested here. The approach adopted in this chapter is more in accord with J. M. Rojas Guerra's approach in the preface of Fals-Borda's *Anthology* (2010). As Rojas Guerra explained: 'Las contribuciones de [Fals-Borda] al conocimiento científico de nuestra realidad social son claramente ilustrativas de la metáfora que se utiliza para representar la dialéctica: la espiral, o la circularidad siempre abierta, que nunca se cierra.'⁷ Indeed, the image of an ever-open spiral seems to be in tune with Fals-Borda's understanding of his own work. In a letter to Tomás Ducay and his wife from Geneva, 1968, Fals-Borda (telling his friends about his lectures at London University), wrote: 'Son elaboraciones de mis viejos temas subversivos ... según veo, están recibiendo aplicación en Europa antes que en Colombia. [Estamos] admirados de la situación estudiantil en Europa. Hasta aquí en Ginebra ha habido "barrage". Ahora ya tenemos el Instituto Ché Guevara de Estudios Latinoamericanos en París.'⁸

This chapter looks at the basis of what Fals-Borda called 'his old subversive topics'. Thus, its hypothesis is that Fals-Borda's critique of the ideological aspect of political violence can be better understood if the ideological and political changes in his personal intellectual trajectory are analysed against the background of his consistent, life-long principles and values.

This chapter is divided into two parts, each of which is divided into three sections. The first part looks at Fals-Borda's personal motivations and professional development

⁷ José María Rojas Guerra, prologue to *Antología*, by Orlando Fals-Borda (Bogotá: Vicerrectoría Académica Universidad Nacional Editorial, 2010), x.

⁸ Letter to Tomás Durán and his wife, Mary, from Geneva on 22 May 1968. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder Universidad_Nacional_75. After his resignation as a Dean of the faculty of Sociology, he did not leave the University but in 1967 he was appointed in special commission with the aim to establish or reinforce the National University's links and projects with other Institutions from the USA and Europe. During this period, Fals-Borda and his wife, settled in Geneva. The lectures he talked about were five lectures delivered by Fals-Borda at the Institute of Latin American Studies London University in 1968. Published as *Revoluciones Inconclusas de América Latina 1809–1968* (Mexico: Siglo Nuevo Editores, 1968), and in English: 'Marginality and Revolution in Latin America: 1809–1969,' *Studies in Comparative International Development United Nations*, Geneva, Vol 6, issue 4 (1970): 63–89.

during the period 1948–1958. The second highlights three crucial aspects of Fals-Borda's intellectual work during this decade, namely: 1) the ethical-religious background; 2) historical analysis of social reality; 3) scientific knowledge of social reality. These three aspects of Fals-Borda's intellectual career, which he developed into a more radical form of criticism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, are crucial in both his analysis of *la Violencia* and philosophy of subversion and his ideology critique of political violence, as will be examined in depth in the next chapters.

This chapter has greatly profited from this author's access to Fals-Borda's original documents, including correspondence with his family, with the personnel of the different Colombian and US institutions he worked in during this period and with friends, lecturers and tutors at the universities of Dubuque, Minnesota, Florida and Colombia between 1949 and 1959. Letters to and from Lowry Nelson and Lynn Smith, tutors for his Master's and PhD degrees with whom Fals-Borda cultivated long-life friendships, have been a rich source of information about both Fals-Borda's professional and personal motivations.⁹

The first part of this chapter follows a narrative-descriptive approach — not only because historical sequence dictates its structure but also because its ultimate aim is to let the young Fals-Borda's voice be heard. The second part combines narrative with an analytic approach. Based on sources unexplored in previous historical research on Fals-Borda, this chapter argues that Fals-Borda's later radical decisions, such as the abandonment of the governmental and academic establishment in the 1960s (Chapter 5) and his engagement with the struggle for land of the agrarian movement in the early

⁹ Professor Lynn Smith from the University of Florida, one of the most relevant academics on Rural Sociology in the USA, was also involved in both teaching and consultancy of large scale projects of rural modernisation in Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Mexico, Cuba and Panamá.

1970s (Chapter 6), were much less a rupture than a continuation of a few leitmotifs wholeheartedly embraced since his early career. The full sense of this hypothesis will be appreciated by the end of the whole thesis.

1. First jobs and the making of a professional rural sociologist: 1948–1958

In 1942 Fals-Borda left his home in the Caribbean city of Barranquilla in order to enter the Military School in Bogotá. His marks were not good enough to allow him to be promoted to the Military Academy but promotion was possible due to the influence of his cousin, the writer Jorge Zalamea Borda, who was President López Pumarejo's private secretary. Fals-Borda was put on the list of candidates for the last four places left. On 5 February 1943, a satisfied Fals-Borda wrote to his family: 'Here I am, after all, as a cadet of the Colombian army.'¹⁰

In spite of Fals-Borda's parents having had to sell a house to defray Fals-Borda's expenses at the Academy, and despite his own progress and adaptation to military life, in June 1944 his mother unexpectedly informed him that there was a scholarship available for him to study for a B.A. in the USA. María Borda de Fals, a social activist and leading member of the Presbyterian Church, had obtained the scholarship from the Institute of International Education through the USA Embassy in Colombia.¹¹ She however left to her son the decision of whether to take it or not. Without too much hesitation Fals-Borda left the Military Academy in order to take up this scholarship in the USA.¹² That very year Fals-Borda attended the University of Dubuque, Iowa, to

¹⁰ Letters from Fals-Borda to his family on 05 and 10 February 1943. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Correspondencia_Escuela_Cadetes_36-43.

¹¹ Letter to Fals-Borda's mother on 16 Mar 1949. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Dubuque_08-09.

¹² *Historia Debida*. Fals-Borda interviewed by Alfredo Molano, part 1, directed by U.N. Television (Original broadcast on 22th February 1995; Bogotá: Canal Uno, 1995).

study for a B.A. in English Literature and Sociology. In 1948 Fals-Borda returned to Colombia to work in the Youth Presbyterian Centre in Barranquilla and soon afterwards he moved to Bogotá where he worked as director of the choir of the Presbyterian Church. In spite of Fals-Borda's passion for choral music, this job was only temporary since soon afterwards Fals-Borda engaged in what was his first job as sociologist. This, his next job at the Winston Brothers Company and his jobs after 1955 when he returned to Colombia in 1955 once he finished his PhD in the USA are the topics examined in the next three sections, respectively.

1.1. Fals-Borda's letter of resignation: 1949

Fals-Borda's first job as sociologist did not last long. The story is as follows: in April 1949, after offering his service to the Ministry of Education, Fals-Borda was appointed as researcher on a social project of the Instituto de Antropología Social in the small town of Vianí — a pilot project of community development funded by UNESCO.¹³ 'The minister said,' Fals-Borda wrote to his mother, 'they were going to appoint me as the person in charge of the archives, because there were many disordered papers in that office.'¹⁴ However, as he recalled years later, there was a problem:

My boss told me I shouldn't establish any contact with the people in the village ... When my boss arrived eight days later, the first thing people told him was that I had established a close relationship with the priest, offering to be his organist for the mass, and that the mayor and I used to go to the bars to drink beer. He saw the organized archive, but he said: You haven't complied with the rules, so I'm going to dismiss you. If you don't want to be dismissed, submit your resignation. I was fired from my first position as a sociologist after 20 days because I had established contact with the people. This was really the beginning of my sociological career.¹⁵

¹³ 87 km northwest from Bogotá.

¹⁴ Letter to Fals-Borda's mother on 16 Mar 1949. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Instituto_Antropología_Social_Colombia_04.

¹⁵ Lola Cendales et al, 'One sows the seed, but it has its own dynamics: An interview with Orlando Fals-Borda,' *International Journal of Action Research* 1, no. 1 (2005): 13. See also Fals-Borda's letter of

In the memorandum with the reasons asking Fals-Borda to resign, Gabriel Ospina Restrepo explained that the young sociologist not only disobeyed him but also became a ‘serious threat to the institute’s harmony’.¹⁶

This episode, remembered humorously by Fals-Borda himself, has served, with justification, to emphasise to his biographers that a people-centred approach as well as an excellent rapport with them were hallmarks of his career. Much as it was true, what is noteworthy lies behind the anecdote. On 31 May 1949, the 24-year-old Fals-Borda signed a letter of resignation, not without first writing a letter to his boss, Ospina Restrepo, Director of the Institute; a letter which, as Fals-Borda wrote at the time, was not going to be published in any newspaper since its only interest was to his addressee.

The letter was never published, or mentioned by Fals-Borda in his interviews. The copy available is the one which Fals-Borda sent first to his parents, with his own handwritten corrections, asking them their opinion.¹⁷ Here are a few relevant fragments:

... Quiero por medio de la presente expresarle lo que pienso, con el solo deseo que lo que aquí escriba pueda ser de ayuda y motivo de progreso, ya que todos decimos perseguir un noble fin, cual es el de la redención moral y material del pueblo colombiano.

Usted ha hecho una gran labor ... pero esto no da fundamento a su afán de mantener a la población y funcionarios, bajo un control absoluto. Ninguno de los empleados del Instituto podíamos hablar con los campesinos acerca de lo que más nos interesaba a todos: el proyecto social. Quizá Ud. tuviera razón al así ordenarlo, pero es mi opinión que toda cosa buena mientras más conocida es más amada. Si el Instituto es bueno y marcha a su meta con justicia y rectitud, debe soportar por lo menos las preguntas y observaciones de los interesados...

resignation signed on 31 May 1949. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Instituto_Antropología_Social_Colombia_17.

¹⁶ 4 May 1949. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Instituto_Antropología_Social_Colombia_14.

¹⁷ There is not a letter or other type of information about what Fals-Borda’s parents’ comments were. In the letter to his brother *Piter* (nickname for Pedro) who was studying in the University of Dubuque, on 24 June 1949, Fals-Borda told him about the letter he sent to Ospina Restrepo; however, he did not mention anything regarding his parents’ comments on it. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Instituto_Antropología_Social_Colombia_01-03; 19.

Realmente Ud. ha hecho una gran labor al asegurarse la adhesión de los dirigentes del pueblo, pero no ha alcanzado al pueblo mismo, que permanecido ignorante, sin representación activa en el instituto y aparte de sus programas, fiestas y actividades, salvo muy contadas excepciones. Esto me lleva a pensar que, al menos por ahora, se interesa más por su propio proyecto (la posición en el gobierno y en la sociedad, el tener máquinas, vehículos y empleados, el dar órdenes, etc.) que por el mismo pueblo a quien supone servir. Pueda ser que Ud. en un día no lejano se dé cuenta de la importancia de establecer aquel contacto constructivo y directo con el pueblo que es básico en toda obra social ...

Según he podido observar — y usted mismo me lo ha dicho — en todas partes cree Ud. ver enemigos en potencia que quieren despojarle de lo que Ud. ha alcanzado. Usted vive esperando a que sus asociados lo traicionen para tener el gusto de eliminarlos ... Sin duda Ud. estará sonriéndose de mi ingenuidad ... Pero por favor recuerde que ... si el país va a progresar en todo sentido, un movimiento debe comenzar con nosotros los de la nueva generación.¹⁸

The tone and the spirit of this letter cannot but recall Walter Benjamin's 'Experience', written in 1913 when he was 21.¹⁹ 'In our struggle for responsibility,' says Benjamin, 'we fight against someone who is masked. The mask of the adult is called "experience".' What does the adult, invested with the authority of grand experience, wish to prove? Benjamin replies: 'This above all: he, too, was once young; he, too, wanted what we wanted; he, too, refused to believe his parents, but life has taught him that they were right ... Such is life. That is what adults tell us, and that is what they experienced.'²⁰

Fals-Borda's letter to Ospina Restrepo was not addressed to him as an individual but in his role as a public servant. The letter is a reflection on inexperienced values sent to an adult whose experience had been shaped by a bureaucratic apparatus. The missive was far from being a complaint or a recrimination. The arguments questioned attitudes and arbitrary norms which, despite impoverishing the project, were justified on the basis of

¹⁸ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Documentos Personales, sub-folder Instituto_Antropología_Social_Colombia_01-03.

¹⁹ See 'Fals-Borda and the Philistine,' in Introduction.

²⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'Experience,' 1913, in Vol. 1 of *Selected Writings 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), 3–4.

the director's experience — 'an experience that he had taken as gospel'. Thus, Fals-Borda acknowledged that he might be taken as foolish or naïve for writing a letter like that; however, he insisted that Ospina Restrepo's attitudes, namely, authoritarianism, discrimination, decision-taking based on prejudices and fears, and always in search of bureaucratic benefits, were in stark opposition to a project meant to invite people to participate actively in the social development of their town.²¹ The letter did not go without a recognition by Fals-Borda himself of his boss's leadership qualities and potential, which, as the former noted, would flourish when Ospina Restrepo realised that only direct and constructive contact with the people would secure the basis for a social project.²²

An exhaustive analysis of Fals-Borda's letter falls out of the scope of this section. What is worthy of attention is that the young Fals-Borda's reflection on the values he envisaged as 'experienceable' (in opposition to his boss's experience), were to develop into distinct elements of his way of dealing with both intellectual work and social commitment. The historical value of this letter lies not only in his conception of civil servants as real servers of people's needs, but in the fact that it was written in the throes of *la Violencia*. The assassination of the Socialist-Liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán had impacted on Fals-Borda so powerfully that for him the only alternative to an escalation of the then ongoing conflict between party faithful was the emergence of 'a new generation able to foster change for the better of the country'.²³ The moral and

²¹ Cfr. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Instituto_Antropología_Social_Colombia_01.

²² ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Instituto_Antropología_Social_Colombia_02.

²³ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Instituto_Antropología_Social_Colombia_02.

spiritual redemption of the country, according to Fals-Borda, was in the hands of his generation — the ‘generation of *la Violencia*’ as he called it later on (see Chapter 3).

The resignation did not present a problem to Fals-Borda. On the contrary, it opened the door to his first independent project of social research with a rural community, which had far-reaching implications in the history of the sociology in Colombia, as will be seen in the next sections.

1.2. Winston Brothers Company and the rural community of Saucío: 1949–1953

In the light of his resignation, Fals-Borda was offered a transfer to another section of the Ministry of Education. He opted instead to leave. His enthusiasm and eagerness to work were at odds with the bureaucratic ways of the Ministry. As he wrote to his brother Pedro about his resignation: ‘Ha sido lo mejor que me ha podido suceder ... ahora sé lo que son los planes sociales del gobierno, sus hombres y sus intrigas. Si hubiera permanecido en Vianí a pesar de todo, hubiera tenido que perder parte de mi personalidad y mi manera de ser, y entrar a hacer prácticas contrarias a mi conciencia.’²⁴

A newspaper advertisement for a bilingual secretary led him to his next job. It was at the Winston Brothers Company, which was building a dam in the canyon of the Sisga River, fifty-six miles north of Bogotá. Soon after, Fals-Borda wrote to Kenneth Wernimont: ‘I am satisfied with my new work, considering that I have managed to keep myself in contact with the peasants.’²⁵

²⁴ Fals-Borda’s letter to his brother *Piter*, about his resignation on 24 June 1949. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Instituto_Antropología_Social_Colombia_19.

²⁵ Letter to Kenneth Wernimont, American Embassy in Bogotá, on 14 June 1949. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Instituto_Antropología_Social_Colombia_18.

Working as the director's assistant, Fals-Borda was in contact with the workers from Saucío, a small neighbourhood near the company camp at Sisga. This rural community, where he lived for two years, became the topic of his M.A. dissertation 'Peasant Society in the Colombian Andes', published in 1955, two years after its completion.²⁶ In the preface Fals-Borda wrote: 'The rural people of Colombia are being swept into the whirl of social revolution that promises to be the distinguishing feature of our century.'²⁷ Lest one be misled by these words, they do not refer to *la Violencia*. The period of observation and fieldwork in Saucío did coincide with the harshest years of *la Violencia*, 1949–1951, but the social revolution Fals-Borda talked about did not in the main have a political meaning. On the one hand, because Saucío, like its surroundings, did not suffer directly the blows of *la Violencia* — the magnitude of which was still unimaginable; on the other hand, because of the non-political way in which Fals-Borda conceived his role as agent of progress and development for rural areas.²⁸ As he put it: 'En pocas cosas se necesita de más ecuanimidad e independencia ideológica que en el planteamiento y en la solución del problema de la tierra en su doble arista técnica y humana.'²⁹ Therefore, it referred to a need of socio-economic transition in the rural areas motivated by the 'very real backwardness' and 'people's unprecedented feeling of dissatisfaction' — which Fals-Borda called 'the peasant problem'.³⁰ If Fals-Borda talked about a 'revolution', it was because the modest, though equitable, desires of the majority

²⁶ It was published by University of Florida Press, 1955. In a letter to Fals-Borda from Lowry Nelson, Fals-Borda's tutor at University of Minnesota, congratulating Fals-Borda for the completion of his PhD, he said: 'I take pleasure in sending you the hearty congratulations of Mrs. Nelson and myself. Even though your degree was granted by the University of Florida, we shall always claim you as one of our "children" also.' Letter on 30 September 1955. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Minnesota_18.

²⁷ Fals-Borda Orlando, *Peasant Society in the Colombian Andes* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1955), vii.

²⁸ The USA non-intervention was guaranteed as long as no US companies or citizens were affected by *la Violencia*. Cfr. Chris Abel, *Política, Iglesia y Partidos en Colombia: 1886–1953* (Bogotá: FAES: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1987), 286.

²⁹ Fals-Borda, *El hombre y la tierra en Boyacá: Bases sociológicas e históricas para una reforma agraria* (Bogotá: Ediciones Documentos Colombianos, 1957), 232.

³⁰ Fals-Borda, *Peasant Society*, viii.

of the rural population were at odds with the government's agenda. At this stage, however, Fals-Borda was still far from a political assessment of the 'peasant problem' — his concern for improving people's lot was mainly ethical and philanthropic.

An episode of Fals-Borda's work at Winston Brothers Company illustrates both the way Fals-Borda was engaged with 'the peasant problem' and his motivations to carry on his education in the USA. In early March 1950, F. Oclassen, Fals-Borda's boss, was requested to write for the company's magazine, the *Winstonian*, an item about the Sisga project. One week later Oclassen replied to headquarters in Bogotá: 'Nothing happens in Sisga. No shooting, no killing — the job going on at its steady pace as usual.' 'However,' he went on, 'if this old gringo has nothing to write home about, why not let a native express his thoughts. A victim was soon found in the person of our secretary — Señor Orlando Fals-Borda. We all like Orlando, an efficient young man with both Colombian and American background ... with the hope of returning to the States for further studies, after the completion of the Sisga job.'³¹

The article Oclassen asked Fals-Borda to write for the *Winstonian* was front page in April 1950. It showed a Fals-Borda who, in stark contrast to his previous job, was within an institutional framework with whose values he identified. He expressed his great appreciation of values such as 'spontaneous fellowship', 'wholesome interchange of ideas and skills', and 'efficiency and love of the work' which he regarded as 'essential in raising the standard of living of the country'.³² These values, as well as the

³¹ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Winston_Bros_Company_01.

³² ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Winston_Bros_Company_02-04.

immediate benefits the construction of the dam brought about for the region, determined his positive view of Truman's Point Four.³³

Fals-Borda's article, however, was not only an interesting testimony to his advocacy of American know-how. It also marked a significant step for him since his article attracted the company president's attention. As Fals-Borda was told, nobody had put Winston Company's mission in such clear and simple terms as he did in his article.³⁴ Hence, when W. J. Rohan, the company president, visited Colombia, he did not hesitate to offer Fals-Borda a post in the United States so that he could do his M.A. whilst working in the headquarters in Minnesota. A jubilant Fals-Borda (who had unsuccessfully tried to obtain another scholarship for his MA from the Institute of International Education³⁵) wrote to his mother:

El viernes pasado sucedió algo extraordinario, que salvo causas imprevistas puede facilitar enormemente mi regreso a los Estados Unidos. Fue algo inesperado, que vino como caído del cielo, pero que demuestra que Dios no nos ha abandonado, sino que sus caminos, aunque confusos, llevan a metas seguras. La propuesta para mi viaje vino nada menos que del presidente de la Winston Bros. Company, actualmente en una gira por Colombia.³⁶

Fals-Borda was able to accept W. J. Rohan's offer in August 1951 when he finished his job in Sisga. His only concern was, as he wrote to his mother, how to coordinate the company's aid with his future plans to return to Colombia as a sociologist.³⁷ As will be mentioned later on, not even professional opportunities to remain in the USA took him away from his original aim: to have an empirical knowledge of the facts and problems of rural life in Colombia in order to plan intelligent campaigns and formulate 'scientific

³³ Point IV was a programme established after President Truman's policy of 'Good-will,' 1949, for Latin American countries, which implied scientific and technical cooperation.

³⁴ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Winston_Bros_Company_05.

³⁵ From which institute Fals-Borda's mother obtained the scholarship for his studies in the USA in 1944.

³⁶ Letter on 9 May. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Winston_Bros_Company_05

³⁷ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Winston_Bros_Company_06.

legislation' and intelligent policies.³⁸ This aim, so early defined in Fals-Borda's career, is the backdrop against which must be seen what some critics contemptuously call his 'positivist and functionalist stage'.³⁹

Moreover, the job at Winston Brothers Company not only gave Fals-Borda the opportunity to live within a rural community and set out his own research but it also allowed him to witness and analyse meticulously a process of rapid sociocultural change caused by the overwhelming impact of modern technological development on a pre-capitalist society.⁴⁰ Additionally his work as the all-round director's office man and then as an improvised, though successful, accountant gave Fals-Borda a great deal of managerial experience, from which his later projects profited greatly.⁴¹

Although his plans were to return immediately to Colombia after finishing his Master's, a Guggenheim scholarship gave Fals-Borda the opportunity to complete his PhD at the University of Florida. To what extent he accomplished his purpose and how this affected his stance on both intellectual work and social action will be examined in the next section.

³⁸ Letters between Fals-Borda and W. J. Rohan, General Director of Winston Brothers Company, on 3, 20 June; 7, 19 September 1955. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Winston_Bros_Company_26, 26, 29 and 31. See also offers of academic posts in the next section.

³⁹ Alexander Pereira explained the co-existence of changes and disjunctions in Fals-Borda's career as a contradiction or paradox, which 'ironically laid the foundations for Fals-Borda's intellectual heterodoxy.' Pereira, 'Fals Borda,' 378. See footnotes 4, 6 and 7 above.

⁴⁰ 'What probably did most in recent times to challenge the traditional characteristics of Saucío was the great work of the Sisga River Dam ... The older generation and the women stayed on the farms but ... the young workers at the dam took great pride in being tractor operators' helpers (one of them became a good operator), or grease monkeys, or mechanics' helpers. Some went into tunnel work, others engaged themselves in electrical work, welding, steel bending, concrete mixing, and plumbing. Not a few learned to drive trucks and drive them well. At the same time, working at the dam made peasants more conscious of the new and advanced social laws of Colombia which had been promulgated from 1936 to 1945. For the first time, Saucites learned of the existence of a labor tribunal where they could file complaints when they thought an injustice had been done them'. Fals-Borda, *Peasant Society*, 24.

⁴¹ Frank Oclassen, Memorandum, 11 July 1951, ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Winston_Bros_Company_12.

1.3. Saucío, birthplace of professional sociology in Colombia: 1955–1958

A few months after Fals-Borda returned to Colombia in 1955, Lowry Nelson encouraged him to apply for a permanent job at one of the universities in the United States.⁴² Fals-Borda did not attempt to do so; however, on 6 July 1956 he was offered an appointment as lecturer at the University of Dubuque. At this university, where Fals-Borda finished his first degree in English Literature and Sociology, he had also obtained an ‘Honors Convocation Certificate Award’ for ‘the most outstanding student’ of the College of Liberal Arts 1947 graduating class. He was additionally selected to appear in the 1946-1947 edition of ‘Who’s Who among Students in the American Universities and Colleges’ multifaceted and charismatic personality.⁴³

Although Fals-Borda’s personality had made an impression on his friends and tutors, the offer received from the University of Dubuque was, according to Leo Nussbaum, Dean of the College, based upon Fals-Borda’s already well known progress in the field of sociology and the quality of the research he had done for both his Master’s and PhD dissertations.⁴⁴

⁴² Letter on 9 February 1956. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Minnesota_29.

⁴³ Copy of Certificate in ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Dubuque_011. In a newspaper cutting headed: ‘Latin-American wins Acclaim,’ it is explained: ‘Orlando’s record while on the Dubuque campus has been most unusual, his interests very diversified. In October, 1944, he came to Dubuque on a missionary scholarship, and he was graduated this June. While here he majored in English and Sociology. In his Senior year he was chosen for Who’s Who among Students in American Universities and Colleges, a choice based in part upon his widespread activities: President of Pan American Club for two years, member of the International Relations Club, associate editor of the student newspaper, the “Cue”, member of the Year Book staff, vice-president of the student Council in 1946, member of the Men’s Chorus, and member of the Gospel Team. His interest further included intramural basketball, tennis, swimming and dramatics.’ In the picture accompanying the news, alongside with Fals-Borda appear his mother, María Borda and his brother Jaime who went to the University of Dubuque in summer 1946 to pursue a pre-med course. The news closes by stating: ‘The measure of good-will and friendliness brought by this Colombian family to the Dubuque campus, were it to be multiplied a thousand times, would make the Good Neighbor Policy a living reality.’ Cutting (summer 1947?). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Dubuque_17.

⁴⁴ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Dubuque_01.

He declined the offer but what is significant about Fals-Borda's response is the consistency with the aim he had set out six years earlier. His reasons constituted the unchangeable framework of his future professional endeavour. As he explained:

I certainly would like to enjoy the advantages and the great teaching opportunities offered by the University of Dubuque. But I feel morally obligated to continue my present work, a mission for which I have trained and to which I feel that I should devote my life. I owe this loyalty to my country and its people. Thus I am unable to accept your offer.⁴⁵

The work Fals-Borda was already engaged in was a programme of reconstruction of rural life in Saucío, with the aim of raising the productivity and the standard of living of peasant farmers. The project, though incipient, had drawn the attention of some authorities and international scholars, which made Saucío an example of social development in the late 1950s.⁴⁶ Fals-Borda's letter declining the post at the University of Dubuque, in spite of its formality, was full of graphic descriptions and written with a tone of enthusiasm. In it, Fals-Borda tried to put in perspective his decision, talking about the relevance of this programme and how his initial impulse was 'picking up momentum'. He also outlined a series of ongoing activities:

1) After six years of contact with an agricultural community, I am at last succeeding in channelling social change toward what I feel are progressive outlets. For instance, for the first time in local history farmers have disinfected their seed and practised seed selection in the field. 2) Out of 41 varieties of blight-resistant potatoes introduced by me from Minnesota in 1952, six have survived. But they are the best potatoes in the region. I am supervising the multiplication of this seed. 3) Two months ago I introduced a scythe for wheat harvesting, in an attempt to displace the ancient and inefficient sickles that the farmers still use. Likewise, other improved farm implements will be tested in an effort to reduce the toil of agricultural tasks

⁴⁵ Letter to G. M. Couchman, President of University of Dubuque, and Leo Nussbaun, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts on 12 July 1956. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Dubuque_03.

⁴⁶ Talking about the warm welcome this Master's dissertation received and the immediate interests in this community that had arisen, Fals-Borda wrote to Professor Lynn Smith: 'The ambassador of the United States ... has expressed his desire to visit Saucío. I had just called the *alcalde* [mayor] of Chocontá to let him know, as the date is April 28.' Letter on 10 April 1956. Lynn Smith himself visited Fals-Borda's project during the summers of 1956, 1957 and 1958. ACH-UN, FOFB Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Florida_54; 82.

and to increase production per capita. I am selecting some of these implements during my present stay in the United States.⁴⁷

Fals-Borda was engaged by technical innovations, but this project was innovative in other respects. As he explained in a letter to William F. Ogburn during his stay in the United States in the summer of 1956: 'I am planning to use schedules in 1960 and to compare results with 1950 results. In this manner I hope to isolate a number of items for which the objective observation made during these intervening years may throw light as to actual process of change.'⁴⁸ When Lowry Nelson learnt about it, he wrote to Fals-Borda: 'You are laying the foundations of a sociology in Columbia [*sic*].'⁴⁹ Sixty years later there seems to be a consensus about this. For J. M. Rojas Guerra, the scientific foundations of sociology in Colombia were laid by Fals-Borda during this decade: from 1949 when he started his research on the neighbourhood of Saucío until 1959, when the process of observation and quantification was published by the newly created Faculty of Sociology, with Fals-Borda as its founder and Dean.⁵⁰

On 19 November 1956, Fals-Borda also declined another offer, this time from John M. MacLachlan, to lecture at Grinnell College, Iowa.⁵¹ Fals-Borda replied in the same tone as before: 'A possibility such as [that] is a great temptation. But I should remain in

⁴⁷ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Dubuque_03. Three of the varieties that were still alive and faring very well were given by Dr Fred Krantz, a professor of horticulture and an internationally known potato breeder, who had been given awards by both the Minnesota Horticultural Society, 1943, and the Potato Association of America, 1953, for his work. As Fals-Borda wrote to Lowry Nelson: 'Two of them have been marketed successfully in Bogotá. As these varieties are superior and taste well, they are becoming more and more accepted by the local farmers.' Letter on 2 June 1958. Also, newspaper clipping on 13 May 1958: 'Fred Krantz, Horticulture Prof. Dies at Home.' ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Minnesota_24; 26.

⁴⁸ Letter from Fals-Borda on 25 June, Montevallo, Alabama, to Prof. William F. Ogburn, Department of Sociology, University of Florida. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Florida_81. From the letter to Lynn Smith on 10 April 1956 it is possible to know that he was teaching a six-week course of sociology at the Alabama College, 18 June–31 July. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Florida_54.

⁴⁹ Letter on 15 November 1957. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Minnesota_27.

⁵⁰ Fals-Borda, *La Teoría y la Realidad del Cambio Sociocultural en Colombia*. Monografías Sociológicas N. 2 (Bogotá: Departamento de Sociología Universidad Nacional, 1959).

⁵¹ Letter on 6 November 1956. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Florida_77.

Colombia doing research and engage in some applied sociology. The latter, as you know, is much needed in view of the rapid growth of this country and perhaps I could aid in smoothing somewhat the transitional stage.’⁵²

Saucío, however, was not the only project Fals-Borda was working on when he was back in Colombia. In June 1955, no sooner had he graduated as PhD at the University of Florida than he was appointed as an assistant chief of socio-economic studies for the Servicio Técnico Agrícola Colombiano Americano (STACA), a joint programme of the United States Point IV Program to Colombia and the Ministry of Agriculture.⁵³ The job could not be as a rural sociologist ‘for the simple reason such job does not exist at present’, a letter from STACA explained.⁵⁴ He was studying the possibilities of fostering migration to, and colonisation of, the western slopes of the Andes in Boyacá, which was in tune with his other main task at that time: the Spanish edition of his doctoral thesis, ‘Fragmentation of holdings in Boyacá, Colombia’ (1955), which he hoped to publish in 1956.⁵⁵ Fals-Borda thought of his book as a help to the Colombian government in its future plans for agrarian reform. As he wrote to Dr Couchman: ‘The land problem is Colombia’s most urgent ... as you may see, I am engaged in activities that require some perseverance. It may be difficult, uncomfortable, and perhaps dangerous, but I must keep on pushing.’⁵⁶ Additionally, he was teaching sociology in

⁵² Letter on 19 November 1956. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Florida_76.

⁵³ See footnote 33.

⁵⁴ Letter from the USA Operations Mission to Colombia on 6 June 1955. ACH-FOFB. Digital. Folder Datos Personales, sub-folder Servicio_Técnico_Agrícola_Colombiano_Americano_STACA_03.

⁵⁵ The Spanish edition published as *El hombre y la tierra en Boyacá: Bases sociológicas e históricas para una reforma agraria* in 1957. As Fals-Borda wrote to Lynn Smith on 10 April 1957: ‘My new book is going to press next week. I was very fortunate in having the financial and distribution backing of the editors and printers, in such manner that I have to foot only one third of the bill. This is most unusual in Colombia, where authors have to pay all expenses and distribute the copies themselves.’ In October that year, Fals-Borda wrote to Smith: ‘The book has had a “phenomenal” sale in Colombia (in comparison with other books), as it is being sold at the rate of 100 per month.’ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Florida_70; 64. The book was revised, re-edited and published again in 1973 with a new introduction, and in 2002 after Fals-Borda’s Honoris Causa Doctorate, the UPTC published it again in 2002.

⁵⁶ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Dubuque_04.

the Faculty of Psychology at the National University, although this only lasted a year. In February 1957, explaining to Lynn Smith the reasons for his resignation, he wrote: ‘There was very little reward in trying to teach uninterested amateur psychologists. Instead, I have received an offer from the Universidad Libre to conduct its sociology course for law students.’⁵⁷

On 15 April 1957 Fals-Borda resigned from STACA to work in cooperation with the Centro Interamericano de Vivienda (CINVA, Inter-American Centre for Housing) as consultant. Simultaneously he was commissioned by the Office of Social Security of the Ministry of Labour to carry out a demographic analysis of some regions in four *departamentos* (states) of Colombia, which in turn allowed Fals-Borda to fill several notebooks with first-hand information about three areas that would be most affected during *la Violencia*, as will be discussed in the next chapter.⁵⁸ In February 1958, Fals-Borda went to Brazil to conduct a study on tropical housing.⁵⁹ This did not stop him from working on two texts, both on social change in Colombian agriculture: ‘La dinámica del cambio social inducido en la agricultura colombiana’, in which he focused on the impact of STACA in Boyacá, and the report on the agro-sociological experiment in Saucío started by himself in 1956.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ In the same letter Fals-Borda mentioned to Lynn Smith a ‘tentative teaching project with the Universidad de los Andes. I just have to be patient until a good opportunity comes.’ 27 February 1957. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Florida_71.

⁵⁸ Antioquia, Cauca, Cundinamarca and Chocó.

⁵⁹ Fals-Borda, *The Sociology of Housing: a theoretical frame reference* (Bogotá: Centro Interamericano de Vivienda, 1959). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Brasil, sub-folder Correspondencia_Brasil_36-39.

⁶⁰ The latter was published in the Journal of Colombian Agronomy, with the aim of it being, as Fals-Borda wrote to Lynn Smith, ‘an eye-opener for a number of the agronomists.’ Fals-Borda’s letter to Lynn Smith on 10 December 1957, ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Florida_67.

During the 1950s, the lens through which Fals-Borda analysed the socio-cultural reality in Colombia was the dialectics of progress, namely the conflict between feudalistic survival, which he regarded as a stumbling block to people's emancipation, and secular democratic political action orientated towards technical and socio-cultural development.⁶¹ Additionally, the lack of an academic programme of social science in Colombia may also explain why Fals-Borda's academic works were more focused on providing the basis for policy-making than on ideological discussions.⁶² This period, however, should not be taken as a period lacking in criticism. On the contrary, it is a period in which crucial elements of Fals-Borda's critique of political violence can already be identified. This is the task of the second part of this chapter.

2. The bases of Orlando Fals-Borda's critical thought: ethics, history and science

A key element in understanding both Fals-Borda's germinal criticism and early commitment to rural development might be sought in his dissertation's epigraph:

Think not that in the king's palace you will escape. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will arise ... from another quarter ... Who knows whether you have not come for such a time as this?'⁶³

The lack of confidence in 'the king's palace' refers to the circles of the elite — 'unable to meet with intelligence and integrity the challenges that arise from within their

⁶¹ Fals-Borda, 'Latin America' (PhD Examinations, University of Florida, Department of Rural Sociology, 1954). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Florida_22.

⁶² When Fals-Borda returned to Colombia, the programme of Social Science of the Escuela Normal Superior had been attacked and substantially diminished by the Conservative governments during *la Violencia*. See, Jaime Eduardo Jaramillo, 'Redes académicas en las ciencias sociales en Colombia: de la Escuela Normal Superior, a la "Tertulia de los sábados" y a la Facultad de Sociología de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia (1940–1970)', (Paper presented at the XVII National Conference of History, Bogotá. 5–10 October, 2015), 5-7.

⁶³ Mordecai to Esther. Book of Esther, in Fals-Borda, epigraph, *Peasant Society*, vii. Ellipses in the original.

society'.⁶⁴ Thus, relief and deliverance, namely intelligent leadership working on far-sighted policies, will arise from another quarter. This is a stance around which Fals-Borda's intellectual and political agenda would consistently revolve: it explains his decisions to return to Colombia after his studies in the USA in 1955, and after his work at the United Nations in Geneva, 1968–1970. It also provides the background for his resignation from the National University in 1969 and the creation of his own foundation in 1971; topics which will be discussed in chapters 4–6.

Having set in place the context of Fals-Borda's years between 1948 and 1958, this section analyses the three distinctive aspects of Fals-Borda's intellectual work and his social commitment: 1) the ethical-religious background; 2) historical analysis of social reality; 3) scientific knowledge of social reality. These aspects, as they would develop between 1963 and 1975, formed the basis of the ethical-theological, ideological and epistemological elements of Fals-Borda's critique of political violence (Chapters 4–6). The first section looks at those aspects of the theologian Richard Shaull's ethical thinking which impacted on Fals-Borda's youth. The second section underlines the importance of socio-historical research in Fals-Borda's early works. The third one emphasises Fals-Borda's scholarly credential which, combined with his administrative skills, brought about the first School of Sociology in Latin America in 1959.

2.1. The ethical-theological bases of Fals-Borda's approach to social change

In a letter of January 1970, an enthusiastic Fals-Borda concisely informed the theologian Richard Shaull of his latest personal and professional developments in

⁶⁴ Fals-Borda, *Peasant Society*, viii.

Geneva, Mexico, Cuba and Colombia, as will be explained further in chapters 4–6.⁶⁵

In the closing paragraph of this letter, Fals-Borda stated: ‘Estimado Dick: Ojalá nos encontremos pronto para intercambiar ideas. Como tú sabes, es mucho lo que te debo intelectualmente y espero, junto con muchos otros de tus amigos latinoamericanos que sigas adelante en tu campaña de renovación intra y extra eclesial.’⁶⁶ This recognition of an intellectual debt to Shaull should be seen in context with their previous relationship in Barranquilla, which laid the foundations for Fals-Borda’s assimilation of Shaull’s theological ideas in the late 1960s (Chapter 4).

Shaull’s influence on Fals-Borda went further back to those years of Fals-Borda’s involvement in the activities of the Presbyterian Church both in the Youth Centre of Barranquilla, which he founded, and in the choir in Bogotá that he directed. There, Fals-Borda witnessed the beginnings of a renewal within Protestant theology under the influence of the theologian Richard Shaull — one of the most influential Protestant theologians in Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s — as will be analysed in more detail in Chapter 4. According to Fals-Borda’s own memories, his personal beliefs and faith, and his relationship with Shaull, were deeply influential throughout his life:

I was very connected to the church, very connected, to such an extent that one of these missionaries who used to come invited me to become a pastor. But my activities were much more than religious ones, they went beyond religion ... I was involved not only with music; I was also the director of a Presbyterian Youth Centre (PYC). That was interesting. The pastor of that church was Richard Shaull, who would later become one of the founders of liberation theology. My great friendship with Shaull went on, and when he was appointed as a pastor to the Presbyterian Church in Bogotá, it happened that I also moved there.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Program Director of the research on Cooperatives and Rural Development at the United Nations Research Institute, Geneva; Latin American Conference of Sociology Mexico, 1969; recent visit and seminars in Cuba and prospect of his return to Colombia in mid-1970.

⁶⁶ Fals-Borda’s letter to Richard Shaull on 27 January 1970 from Geneva. ACH-UN, FOFB. Folder Congresos_Asociaciones, sub-folder Congreso_Mundial_Iglesias_366.

⁶⁷ Lola Cendales et al., ‘One sows the seed,’ 11-12.

In 1942, at the age of twenty-two, Richard Shaull, just graduated from Princeton Seminary with high honours, ordained and married, went to Colombia under appointment of the Presbyterian Foreign Board. In the city of Barranquilla, the Shaulls settled in a working-class neighbourhood. As stated in Shaull's records of service: 'So great was his influence that he, a North American lad of twenty-five, was elected Honorary President of a labour union in Barranquilla.'⁶⁸ Shaull also began intensive work with young people, leading them into service of teaching and preaching in deprived areas. He organised evangelistic teams and a regular theological seminar in his own home. He continued this theological teaching in Bogotá when he was later transferred there.

Among these young men influenced by Shaull was Fals-Borda, who took the initiative to create the Youth Centre on his return to Colombia after his degree in the USA. Mildred, Shaull's wife, mentioned Fals-Borda to her friends in the USA when writing about their newest work — a half-hour weekly radio programme broadcast every Sunday. In a letter dated 17 May 1948, she wrote: 'The young man in charge, who graduated from Dubuque University, is a teacher in our Boys' School. He plans, develops, and originates most of the programs and supervises the technical aspects as well. So far people have been well satisfied with the program and many who would not dare to enter a Protestant church will listen to our program in their homes.'⁶⁹ Fals-Borda

⁶⁸ Out of this came a weekly radio programme. As appointed Literacy Committee Chairman of the Mission and Synodical co-chairman of Church Promotion, Shaull's literacy campaign in Barranquilla and neighbouring villages soon became a regional programme supported by the local government. In 1945, he opened a new building for night school for workers. Presbyterian Historical society, United Presbyterian Church in the USA. Shaull, Rev. Millard Richard, Folder 1, RG360. March 1949.

⁶⁹ Letter from Mildred Shaull on 17 May 1948. Presbyterian Historical Society, United Presbyterian Church in the USA (PHS, UPC-USA). Shaull, Rev. Millard Richard, Folder 1, RG360. Doc_112. The Presbyterian Pastor Gonzalo Castillo-Cardenas, co-founder of the Rosca Foundation, recalled that he first met Fals-Borda in an ecumenical event of the Latin American Evangelical Youth Movement in Barranquilla, where 'Fals-Borda belonged to the active group of youngsters led by Richard Shaull.' Interview conducted by Pérez Benavides, in Pérez-Benavides Isay, *La Influencia Religiosa en la Conciencia Social de Orlando Fals-Borda* (Barranquilla: Corporación Universitaria Reformada. Serie Catedra Orlando Fals-Borda, 2010), 52.

moved to Bogotá soon after Shaull had been transferred there in mid-1948 — few months after the assassination of the popular leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on 9 April (see next chapter).

The situation of socio-political unrest in Colombia in particular, and Latin America in general, led Shaull to consider the implications of his mission outside the ecclesiastical sphere.⁷⁰ In a letter of October 1952, after visiting Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina, Shaull wrote a ‘strictly confidential’ report to three members of the Presbyterian Foreign Board about Latin American prospects of ‘terrific unrest’. After reporting an increasing sense of anti-Americanism, Shaull analysed the crisis of liberal democracy due, on the one hand, to inflation, rapid shifts of population from rural areas to the cities and decreasing economic production; on the other, to industrial expansion and the political potential of the industrial proletariat. He anticipated three possible political scenarios: first, a strong and violent dictatorship of the extreme right led by certain elements of the army and the Church (‘which is practically what you have in Colombia,’ he wrote); second, some type of authoritarian-nationalistic movement; and third, ‘personally I fear,’ wrote Shaull, ‘Communism may easily take over in some parts of the continent, and sooner than we think ... The violent anti-Americanism rampantly plays into its hands.’⁷¹

⁷⁰ In Shaull’s eyes, the situation in Bogotá presented positive prospects for his mission: ‘Then months have passed. Bogotá has tried to forget,’ wrote Shaull. ‘The life of the city is practically normal and the fire-gutted ruins have been torn down. But deep down underneath, thousands of people are living in black despair. Their political leader [Jorge Eliécer Gaitán], he whom they trusted to solve the terrific problems facing this country today is dead. And they have lost faith in the Catholic Church, which is the only religion they have known. That feeling of distrust toward the church, and especially the clergy, has been growing for years.’ Report from Bogotá, December 1948. PHS, UPC-USA. Shaull, Rev. Millard Richard, Folder 1, RG360.

⁷¹ Letter to Charles T. Leber, W. Stanley Rycroft and Charles Forman from Campinas, Brazil, on 11 October 1952. PHS, UPC-USA. Shaull, Rev. Millard Richard, Folder 1, RG360, Ref: Missionary Personal, Doc_98-99.

Despite the alarming tone of his report, Shaull's aim was far from raising condemnatory cries against Communism. His plan of action focused on two main aspects: first, a systematic analysis of Marxism and Communism and second, a new ethical thinking — theologically and politically well informed. This strategy was meant to tackle two critical issues of Protestantism in Latin America: 1) 'a sense of loyalty to certain ethical principles which forced outstanding Evangelicals to practically withdraw from the world'; 2) 'an irresponsible criticism of the government on secondary political issues which had no theological or ethical basis but which compromise the position of the church, and obscure its witness.'⁷² Shaull's aim was to form a new generation able to act responsibly in authoritarian societies.

According to Shaull, the challenge posed by Communism had nothing to do with a dilemma between good and evil. On the contrary, it was a situation which demanded great historical understanding and radical changes in the Church. 'Communism has beaten us at our own game of evangelizing the world,' Shaull said. 'It has done so, not primarily by force of arms but by a keener awareness of the human situation: they have confronted a world lost in meaninglessness with a clear-cut comprehensive world-view and philosophy of life which can provide the framework for a meaningful existence.'⁷³ That is why, Shaull explained, the most enthusiastic Communists were not exploited workers but rather intelligent and sensitive intellectuals: 'Protestants concern themselves that people don't smoke and drink, Communists are concerned about human suffering and injustice.'⁷⁴

⁷² Letter to Charles T. Leber, et al. PHS, UPC-USA. Shaull, Rev. Millard Richard, Folder 1, RG360, Ref: Missionary Personal, Doc_99.

⁷³ Shaull Richard, an address at the Conference of the Division of Foreign Missions at Toronto, Canada, January, 1952. PHS, UPC-USA. Shaull, Rev. Millard Richard, Folder 1, RG360. Doc_106.

⁷⁴ Shaull Richard, an address at the Conference. Doc_110.

By the Conference of the Division of Foreign Missions in Toronto 1952, Shaull's approach to missionary work had become a focus of discussion. In the light of what he called the 'Christian churches' tragic failure in Latin America', Shaull attributed Communism's rapid spread not only to its 'evangelistic zeal'. Communism's tremendous power, says Shaull, lay in the unity of theory and action, a total world-view with a clear-cut programme of social change. Whilst Christians had accepted a fatal dichotomy between theology and ethics, Communism was 'a faith which offers a hope of changing the structures and institutions of life'.⁷⁵ In 1952, Shaull outlined a programme for the Christian mission of both ministers and laymen: if Christians hoped to have any influence where Communism was strong, it would be vital to have a 'faith which will provide a motive for concern about social injustice and dynamic for social action, [and] a theology which will force Christians to become involved in all areas of social, economic and political life'.⁷⁶ As the next chapter will indicate, this new sense of social commitment — ethically and theologically motivated — would have a significant impact on Fals-Borda's early career. As Presbyterian, Fals-Borda's enthusiasm and concern about social change was not only a personal and professional matter, it also related to the way Fals-Borda conceived his role as sociologist: as the means to bring relief and deliverance.

2.2. Historical knowledge of reality

The establishment of a professional sociology in Colombia cannot be detached from Fals-Borda's activity as historian. As he remembered, 'the complex riddle [of the rural world] in this part of the globe', could not be understood simply by using a cross-

⁷⁵ Shaull Richard, an address at the Conference. Doc_109.

⁷⁶ Shaull Richard, an address at the Conference. Doc_110.

sectional approach or engaging in participant-observation and other kinds of fieldwork. Many gaps remained which ‘made it necessary to go into the cloistered rooms of archives, to the early chronicles, and to period historians.’⁷⁷ Moreover, with his Caribbean background, he could explore with fresh eyes the *terra incognita* of the mestizo culture of the Colombian Andes — a region heavily influenced by Hispanic traditionalism and the main scene of *la Violencia*.

Fals-Borda’s long-term analysis of Saucío, Boyacá and a series of studies on the ‘peasant problem’ (or land–man problem) carried out during the 1950s laid the historical foundation for what he would later call *sacred society* (see Chapter 4).⁷⁸ He observed in these rural communities an all-embracing and monopolistic system in regard to socio-cultural and political matters, which, he states, ‘seems to be mainly the result of the combined action of the formal religious and political institutions over the long span of four centuries’.⁷⁹ In Fals-Borda’s analysis of the sacralised features of the rural world can be discerned at least three key elements which he related to the colonial period:

1) A system of bonded labour that appears like that of Spain’s seigniorial organization.⁸⁰ By looking at archives, titles deeds, chronicles of the colonial period, and law and constitutional reforms, Fals-Borda sought explanations for the social structure of Andean farmers engaged in intensive and extensive, though backward, agriculture. By tracing back the history of land appropriation in Saucío to the pre-Columbian period, he sought explanations for the contrast between large *haciendas*

⁷⁷ Fals-Borda, *Peasant Society*, p. ix.

⁷⁸ These studies are: Fals-Borda, ‘Fray Pedro Aguado, the forgotten chronicler of Colombia and Venezuela’ (1955); ‘Odyssey of the sixteenth-century document Fray Pedro de Aguado’s *Recopilación historial*’ (1955); ‘Notas sobre la evolución del vestido campesino en la Colombia central’ (1953); ‘Los orígenes del problema de la tierra en Choconta’ (1954); ‘El problema de la tierra visto a través de los linderos de un resguardo indígena’ (1959).

⁷⁹ Fals-Borda, *Peasant Society*, 232.

⁸⁰ Fals-Borda, *Peasant Society*, 112-113.

(states) and the failing small-holdings.⁸¹ He analysed the elimination and redistribution of Indian reservations by so-called democratic principles from the 1830s onwards. Indians became citizens of the new republic, but once their legal communal land rights were nullified, they were easy prey for land-owners. The new laws, observed Fals-Borda, turned them into slaves living in abject poverty.⁸² In these studies Fals-Borda also examined the historical development of *concertados* or *apegados* (debt peonage system) which ensured that the workers were for ever in debt to the landowners.

2) The military and religious zeal with which Spain undertook the conquest of America. Without consideration of the role of the church, the Spanish enterprise not only lacks its ideology but also its teleology. This zeal was not without a significant precedent. The expulsion of the Jews and the Muslims along with conquest of Granada by Isabella of Castile in 1492 was seen as a confirmation of divine will for the Spanish Crown to enlarge the Kingdom of God on earth. From this emerged the Church-state as historical instrument of the epic expansion of Christianity in the New World'.⁸³ Consequently, in spite of the numerous material benefits, the justification for the Spanish conquest was essentially spiritual: the divine mission of converting the Indians to the Catholic faith and hence, of saving their souls.⁸⁴ Unsurprisingly, the deepest socio-cultural

⁸¹ In 1949, Saucó consisted of 77 households, whose heads were mostly farmers (93%). Of the 3,100 acres of the rural neighbourhood, 70% was owned by absentee landlords. The other 30% (945 acres) was divided among 42 owners of which one person owned 66% of it (594 acres). Fals-Borda, *Peasant Society*, 73. Therefore, such smallholding was the major boundary to mechanisation of agricultural system.

⁸² Fals-Borda's demographic study of the state of Nariño, a border area with Ecuador, was an eyewitness description of the same process of elimination of Indians communal land that Saucó had undergone a century before. Fals-Borda, 1959, *El vínculo con la tierra y su evolución en el Departamento de Nariño*, Dirección General del Ministerio de Agricultura. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Visiones_Colombia, sub-folder Nariño, Notas_Viaje_Nariño_85.

⁸³ Fals-Borda, *Subversion and Social Change in Colombia*, trans. Jacqueline D. Skiles (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969), 37.

⁸⁴ The philosophical and theological debates in the Spanish Court originated by the University of Salamanca on the legitimisation of a 'just war', the morality of the colonisation and the 'Indian law' helped reinforce the alleged spiritual legitimisation of the Conquest. However, the discussion, for instance on whether the Indians had or had not a soul, also hinged on pragmatic reasons. The main one was the Church's right to evangelise. Should it be accepted the Indians did not have souls, as the theologian and lawyer Ginés de Sepúlveda argued (to legitimise the king's right to wage war against the natives of

contradictions of the colonial system — as much as its effectiveness — came from this spiritualisation of material goals.⁸⁵ The evangelisation of the world ceased to be a merely utopian objective in order to become the foundation of a specific ideology that was translatable into acts of social organization; the initial utopia — the *orbis christianus* — became a *topia*, a sacralised social order.

3) The coalescence of the cross and the sword still lacked a third and equally important element to explain the formation of an ethos of the kind that Fals-Borda analysed in his early works: its own humanism.⁸⁶ According to Fals-Borda, this humanism, more in debt to the spirit of the Counter-Reformation than to that of the Renaissance, was certainly as important as the ‘cross’ and the ‘sword’ in legitimising the *pax hispanica*: a social order of extraordinary durability accomplished by a combination of violence, coercion and persuasion.⁸⁷ The colonial world, with its fondness for bureaucracy and restrictive laws (to control even trivial matters such as street-layout in the new towns), with its ready-made solutions and lack of open conflicts, with its cultural inertia and its uncritical morality, with its tradition of erudite poets and scholastic theologians fond of metaphysical speculations, with its dismissal of practical sciences and rejection of foreign influences, came to resemble an Arcadia about which poets wrote longingly at the end of the nineteenth century.⁸⁸ However, cultural and economic stagnation of the

America), the Church would have no role to play. Enrique Dussel, *A history of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation, 1942–1979* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), 52–55.

⁸⁵ ‘The Church cannot detach itself from environment and culture, but theocracy as a means of domination proves to be a boomerang.’ Fals-Borda, ‘Implications for the World Conference of the Recent Catholic Development in Latin America’ (Study request by the World Council of Churches, Department on Church and Society, Geneva. Presented on 14 April 1964). ACH-UN, FAFS, 1964, Box 1443, Folder 06_11.

⁸⁶ Cult of the ancient Greek and Latin culture, philosophical and theological scholastic disquisitions and jurisprudence. Along with theology, the study of grammar and law were essential parts of the academic curriculum (trivium) of the Colonial period and earlier Republican period. Gonzalo Soto Posada, ‘Latín y Cultura en Colombia: rastreo a través de la lengua latina de la presencia de la cultura española en la historia colombiana,’ *Revista Historia y Sociedad*, No 12, November (2006): 136–137.

⁸⁷ Fals-Borda, *Subversion*, 62; ‘Implications for the World Conference of the Recent Catholic Development in Latin America,’ 1964, ACH-UN, FAFS 1964, Box 1443, Folder 06_2.

⁸⁸ Juan Mario Díaz, ‘Estudio Crítico Social de las ideas Literarias del “Museo Cuadros de Costumbres” de “El Mosaico” 1858–1872,’ (MA dissertation, Universidad Javerinana, 2008), 58.

rural population (85% of Colombians) was the counterpart to this political system that boasted of being both enlightened and progressive.⁸⁹ It was a contrast that in his insightful study on 'Latin and Culture in Colombia', the historian Soto Posada called 'humanitas colombiana' — an humanism which is both erudite and violent.⁹⁰

Despite falling short of being critical, in a strictly political sense, Fals-Borda's historical understanding of the present was far from conceiving history as a mere tool to enhance his sociological work with facts from the past. Crucial aspects of his later critical historiography were already apparent in his early works such as the demystification of cultural stereotypes, approach from below, history as the memory of peasant and Indian struggles for land, and a criticism of the main institutions which had forged the peasantry's 'ethos of passivity and resignation'.⁹¹

Moreover, this chapter argues that the long-term historical analysis of the 'peasant problem' provided him with the basis to analyse the chronic cultural and economic stagnation of rural areas, conditions which proved to be explosive with the onset of *la Violencia* (see next chapter). For J.M. Rojas Guerra, this period also laid the foundation of Fals-Borda's 'uncontested merits' of the long-term historical analysis carried out in *Subversion and Social Change* (1967).⁹² How Fals-Borda's interest in history turns into a dialectical and materialist approach to history after which he re-defined his political ideology in favour of class struggle, will be the focus of Chapter 5.

⁸⁹ Fals-Borda, *Peasant Society*, 241.

⁹⁰ Through the study of the Classics the *ius belli* (the law of war) was learnt. In response to Bishop Pablo Jovio's protests at the brutality of the conquistadores against the indigenous population, Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada, founder of Bogotá in 1538, and a Latinist himself, argued that the intellectual and moral duty is to defend the Spanish enterprise: *Si triunfó, España merece reinar*. Soto Posada, 'Latín y Cultura en Colombia,' 138.

⁹¹ Fals-Borda, *Peasant Society*, 231; *El hombre y la tierra en Boyacá*, 270-272.

⁹² Rojas Guerra, prologue, xxix.

2.3. Empirical knowledge of reality

After the programme of Social Science of the Escuela Normal Superior was dismantled by the conservative regimes during *la Violencia*, a small group of intellectuals created a weekly seminar called *Tertulia de los Sábados*. Some of its members would be the first lecturers of the School of Sociology founded by Fals-Borda, who also frequented the *Tertulia*.⁹³ Virginia Gutiérrez de Pineda, one of the lecturers of this School, in whose house the meetings were held, remembered that when Fals-Borda returned from the United States he was talking of sociology as a science:

Quería que una élite intelectual, después de una estricta formación teórica, se proyectara sobre el campo de la realidad nacional. Quería que se analizara cada fenómeno social: que se dijera con cifras concretas la angustia tenencial del hombre del agro, se desplegara en cifras su éxodo urbano, se proyectara la nacionalidad en el pasado y en la etnia y se analizaran los factores propicios y negativos al cambio.⁹⁴

Indeed, Fals-Borda's high regard for factual evidence and for impartial verification engulfed all areas of research: from long-term analysis of the historical evolution of land distribution to the observation of individual cases exhaustively analysed and accurately reported — a practice which in his time was very rare. His study on 'Costos de Producción Agrícola en un Minifundio: Trigo y Ajo', was a rigorous study in which every aspect and stage was meticulously quantified. By drawing a parallel between traditional and the more systematic and technical forms of production, Fals-Borda managed to quantify both the farmers' meagre profits and the losses due to ignorance of techniques, methods and resources then available. The data on agricultural production previously available, as he pointed out, were not only inaccurate but, above all, had

⁹³ Jaramillo, 'Redes académicas en las ciencias sociales en Colombia.' 4-5.

⁹⁴ Gutiérrez Virginia, speech on 2 April 1966. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder Universidad_Nacional_101.

omitted the real implication of agrarian production for people's lives.⁹⁵ As he wrote in his case study on the costs of production of wheat and garlic in a smallholding:

Hasta hace relativamente poco tiempo había una completa ignorancia en Colombia, y algo de desinterés también, sobre los costos de producción agrícola. Es cierto que se habían compilado cifras de producción agrícola nacional ... pero ningún especialista utilizó estos datos como punto de partida para estudios de campo más realistas y detallados.⁹⁶

Significantly lacking were demographic records. As observed by Fals-Borda in one of his PhD examinations, only a few Latin American countries had demographic records and in general they were very poor; in fact, Uruguay had none by 1950. As Fals-Borda put it, 'there was an absolute chaos in social accounting in Latin America until 1950, e.g. in Colombia the birth rate of the nation was calculated from the annual rate of baptisms effected by Catholic priests per 1000 population'.⁹⁷

With the sponsorship of the United Nations and the Organisation of American States, the Latin American nations agreed to standardise their censuses and to carry them out in the same year. Fals-Borda noticed that some countries, such as Colombia, Brazil and Mexico, 'were unable to fulfil their obligations during the year 1950 due to internal political conditions'.⁹⁸ In 1957, Lynn Smith, who was working on a book on the population of Latin America, wrote to Fals-Borda: 'I keep hoping for the rest of the 1951 Census reports, for I dislike trying to rework the Colombian data without them,

⁹⁵ Fals-Borda, 'Costos de producción agrícola en un minifundio: trigo y ajo,' in Fals-Borda, *Antología* (Bogotá: Vicerrectoría Académica Universidad Nacional Editorial, 2010), 26.

⁹⁶ Fals-Borda, 'Costos de producción agrícola,' 25.

⁹⁷ By comparing birth rates as recorded with fertility ratios in each nation, Lynn Smith's *The Reproduction Rate in Latin America*, noticed a considerable underrepresentation of births, something between 30 and 40 percent. In Fals-Borda, 'Population and Rural' (PhD Examinations, University of Florida, 1954). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Florida_35.

⁹⁸ Fals-Borda, 'Population and Rural' (PhD Examinations, University of Florida, 1954). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, sub-folder University_Florida_34.

but there seems to be considerable delay. Even my work on Latin America, the general book, will suffer because of my lack of the complete data from Colombia.’⁹⁹

Due to lack of accurate information about rural reality, together with poor general knowledge about modern farming techniques, soil conditions and seed stock available, both peasants and landowners had problems to increase crop production.¹⁰⁰ Thus, Fals-Borda appreciated that it was vital for traditional rural land workers and landowners to adopt new agricultural methods in order to improve their poor harvests and to evolve into efficient ‘scientific’ farmers.

To policy-makers, ‘scientific’ agriculture meant ‘mechanised’ agriculture. But mechanisation was extremely difficult under the circumstances: complex land ownership, colonial methods of cultivation, superstitions, small isolated and fragmented farms plus the rough geographical conditions. In contrast, to Fals-Borda, ‘scientific’ agriculture meant gradual transition to modernisation of the traditional rural activity enhanced by education.¹⁰¹ From his observations during the construction of the dam in Sisga, Fals-Borda concluded that an increase in economic benefits (for instance, farmers’ greater purchasing power or more free time) would not necessarily improve personal and social development — only an approach based on education, he argued, would succeed in preventing further rural stagnation.¹⁰² Fals-Borda’s ideas on the role of education were also welcomed by Robert J. Havighurst, from the Committee on

⁹⁹ Letter on 16 April 1957. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, University_Florida_69.

¹⁰⁰ Description based on data and observation in eight municipalities of the state of Boyacá and a *Resguardo Indígena* in the state of Nariño. Fals-Borda, ‘Fragmentation of Holdings in Boyacá, Colombia,’ *Rural Sociology*, vol. 21, no. 2, June (1956): 158-163; ‘El problema de la tierra visto a través de los linderos de un resguardo indígena,’ *Revista Bolívar*, no. 51 (1959): 7-12.

¹⁰¹ ‘Muchos economistas y profesionales aconsejan la mecanización como si esta fuera una panacea que curara todos los males agrarios. Es probable que la introducción de maquinaria agrícola se justifique en haciendas y tierras planas ... pero recomendar[la] a un minifundista, es erróneo. Fals-Borda, ‘Costos de producción agrícola,’ 30.

¹⁰² Fals-Borda, *Peasant Society*, 81-83.

Human Development, who requested and defrayed the cost of the translation into Spanish of Fals-Borda's Master's dissertation's chapters 13 and 14 for the UNESCO manual on Society and Education in Latin America.¹⁰³

Almost a decade after Fals-Borda's first contact with the community of Saucío, education appeared to be the means under which the traditional ethos of passivity and submission could be progressively moulded into a more emancipative one — albeit an education able to instil in the people 'an earnest desire to get away from the practices that have maintained them poor morally, spiritually, and physically for so many decades.'¹⁰⁴ In this vein, the construction of the local school of Saucío became a symbol, in fact a national monument, of such socio-cultural change. In the first place, because it was the action of an organised community using local labour to achieve communal aims. Also, because the first Board of Communal Action in Colombia was established in the facilities of that school in Saucío.¹⁰⁵

In 1958, the Advisory Group of Communitarian Development policy in Colombia introduced a programme of development inspired by Camilo Torres's communal organisation in Tunjuelito (a shanty town in Bogotá) and Fals-Borda's project in Saucío (both were members of the Advisory team). In the 1960s, this gave rise to the spread of Communal Action organisations. 'After such innovative and entrepreneurial experiences, the Advisory Group was enthusiastic about the prospect of working with people usually regarded by the political elite as unable to cooperate with each other and lacking in initiatives. These works and many others created a favourable environment in

¹⁰³ 'The development of the Peasant Individual' and 'The role of religion in Peasant life,' respectively. See letters from and to Robert J. Havighurst on 13 February and 8 April 1958. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro_Peasant_Society_Colombia_15-17

¹⁰⁴ Fals-Borda, *Peasant Society*, 81.

¹⁰⁵ Lola Cendales et al., 'One sows the seed,' 25-26.

the country and paved the road for the establishment of the development policy of the Colombian state, which was enshrined in Law 19 of 1958.’¹⁰⁶

Despite its important contributions to Fals-Borda’s academic formation, his ‘positivist stage’ has been generally regarded as a hindrance in his career, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter.¹⁰⁷ Prejudices of this sort held by some of Fals-Borda’s critics underplayed his life-long convictions — one of which was the tenet that all criticism must be based upon empirical knowledge. The dialectic at this stage was not ideological. It was epistemological in its most essential sense: a radical rupture with dogmatism, fanaticism and speculation. These years were for Fals-Borda, using Gaston Bachelard’s words, the years of ‘the formation of the scientific mind’.¹⁰⁸

A crucial continuity: commitment to the fate of the peasantry

In a letter to W. J. Rohan, president of the Winston Brothers Company, telling him about the finalisation of his PhD, Fals-Borda wrote: ‘It is expected that I will receive my PhD in June 1955. However, I am not planning on it. As I had remarked often, I came to Florida first to be trained in a science which I feel is necessary for the future and well-being of Colombia, and second to earn a degree if possible.’¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, Fals-Borda was fully aware of the relevance of both his training as professional sociologist and his dissertations. About *Peasant Society*, he wrote: ‘Although the book

¹⁰⁶ Fals-Borda, ‘La participación comunitaria: observaciones críticas sobre una política gubernamental,’ *Revista Análisis Político*, no. 2 (1987): 84.

¹⁰⁷ See footnotes 4 to 7.

¹⁰⁸ Bachelard, *The Formation of the Scientific Mind*, (Manchester: Clinamen, 2001).

¹⁰⁹ Letter on 7 July 1954. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Winston_Bros_Company_7. One year later, letting Rohan know of his appointment as co-director of a project in charge of the Point IV programme to Colombia, Fals-Borda wrote: I have also had offers from other institutions, which made me feel that perhaps I am not going to starve, at least for the time being. In a country like Colombia, however, where sociology is little known as a science, I would like to be always ready for the worst. Letter on 20 June 1955 replying to Rohan’s congratulations on his graduation. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Winston_Bros_Company_26.

is scientific, we all expect that it will sell well because it is the first of its kind coming out of Colombia, and in a sense, from Latin America.’¹¹⁰

Appreciating Fals-Borda’s determination to foster social change to the benefit of the rural population is a decisive element in understanding his intellectual and political career. His epistemological journey from positivism to committed sociology, and from militant sociology to the development of Participatory Action Research (PAR) will be analysed in Chapter 6. At this stage what is important is to highlight that he was committed to the reality of his country rather than with any particular theory or institutions. This was the basis for Fals-Borda’s later dilemma between, as D. Goulet put it, ‘conflicting loyalties’. It might be argued that this period of Fals-Borda’s career — rather than laying the basis for his critique of the ideological element of the political violence — represented the heritage against which Fals-Borda would rebel when dedicating himself to the struggle of the destitute. But a critique of this sort would require much more than political awareness and non-conformism.

During this period of his life, Fals-Borda was learning about scientific research and management of projects, and applying his scientific approach to social reality. The social transformation of the community of Saucío, which he witnessed, was a significant experience in his early life. Without appreciating this background, it would be difficult to understand Fals-Borda’s search for a method of both social research and political participation from the early 1970s onwards. It becomes evident that Fals-Borda’s critique of political violence was not the result of theoretical or ideological ruptures but was a continuous dialectic between his vocation as social scientist committed to social change for the people of his land.

¹¹⁰ Letter from and to Claudia Wheaton, a donor toward the publication of Fals-Borda’s Peasant Society, on 18 and 21 September 1954. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital, Libros, Libro_Peasant_Society_35-38.

Chapter Two

La Violencia:

The Socio-Political Dimension of the Moral Question

The complexity of the analysis described in the book *La Violencia en Colombia* (LVC) (1962) was emphasised by Fals-Borda, co-author of the book, at the Fifth World Conference of Sociology, Washington, 1962: ‘As we know,’ he said, ‘very few detailed studies have been made of large groups in a state of conflict. Not much is known about groups under prolonged strife; even more rare are studies of the application of the techniques of violence on a grand scale, where the violence literally runs away with itself in an uncontrolled fashion, and produces unforeseen and unpredictable results ... such was the case with the Colombian *Violencia*.’¹

Fals-Borda’s paper for this conference was based on the sociological analysis he carried out in the last chapter of LVC: Chapter 13.² In spite of the large bibliography available since, the analysis of *la Violencia* still poses two basic historiographical challenges in relation to the ethical question.³ First, it is one of those conflicts where no appeal to the

¹ Fals-Borda, ‘The Role of Violence in the Break with Traditionalism: The Colombian Case,’ in *The Sociologists, the Policy-Makers and the Public. The Sociology of Development*. Volume III. (Transactions of the Fifth World Congress of Sociology, Washington D. C., 2–8 September, 1962. Washington: International Sociological Association, 1964), 21.

² The acronym LVC refers only to the first volume published in 1962. When it refers to the second volume, the year will be added: LVC (1963). Edition used: Germán Guzmán, Fals-Borda and Eduardo Umaña, *La Violencia en Colombia* vol. 1 and 2, 1962 and 1963. Reprint (Bogotá: Editora Aguilar, 2005).

³ Among the most relevant ones can be mentioned: Vernon Lee Fluhartly, *Dance of the Millions: Military Rule and the Social Revolution in Colombia, 1930–1956* (1957); Francisco Posada, *Colombia: violencia y subdesarrollo* (1968); Paul Oquist, *Violencia conflictiva y política en Colombia* (1976); Russell W. Ramsey, *Guerrilleros y soldados* (1981); Gonzalo Sanchez and Donny Meertens, *Bandoleros, gamonales y campesinos: El caso de la violencia en Colombia* (1983); Daniel Pecaú, *Orden y violencia: Colombia 1930–1953* (1987). In the mid–1980s attention was also given to regional expressions of *la Violencia* with studies such as Carlos Miguel Ortiz, *Estado y subversión en Colombia, la violencia en el Quindío años 50* (1985); Javier Guerrero, *Los años del olvido. Boyacá y los orígenes de la violencia* (1991); Elsy

documentary record as a higher authority can be made since, as stated in the introduction, seventy-nine sacks containing the Ministry of Internal Affairs' official documents between 1949 and 1958 were destroyed by official decree in 1967.⁴ Second, researchers have to take into account both the fragmentation of the phenomenon and the bias of nationwide-spread narratives entrenched in partisan historiography.

Even the last and most serious collective attempt to elucidate the history of the conflict in Colombia, the *Comisión Histórica del Conflicto y sus Víctimas* (CHCV) (2015), found itself entangled by irreconcilable interpretations.⁵ Although the report, written by some of the most authoritative researchers on the history of the conflict in Colombia, dwells on crucial elements upon which a collective narrative can be established, it does not tackle the ethical question underlying *la Violencia*, which is the topic this chapter aims to address.

The main criticism of the report, consisting of twelve studies and two analyses, all written independently, was that despite its length (809 pages), it fell short of clarifying the historical truth of the conflict.⁶ Given the nature of the report, more interpretative than investigative, what Leon Valencia called the 'failure of the commission' is the failure of the local historical narratives to reach a common ground about the country's

Marulanda, *Colonización y conflicto. Las lecciones del Sumapaz* (1991); Darío Betancourt y Martha García, *Matones y Cuadrilleros* (1991); María Victoria Uribe, *Matar, rematar y contramatar* (1990); Alejo Vargas, *Colonización y Conflicto armado: Magdalena medio santandereano* (1992); Carlos Mario Perea, *Porque la sangre es espíritu* (1996); Mary Roldán, *Blood and Fire: La Violencia in Antioquia Colombia, 1946–1953* (2003).

⁴ Acta Número 1 del Comité de Archivo y Correspondencia Ministerio de Gobierno, 04 enero 1967, in Archivo General de la Nación (AGN).

⁵ The Historical Commission of the Conflict and its Victims was created in 2014 as part of the process of negotiation between the government and the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) in La Havana, Cuba. The Commission issued a report in February 2015, which was written independently by twelve scholars. The final document was introduced by two analyses also written independently by Pizarro Leongómez and Víctor Manuel Moncayo. The Commission report will hereafter be cited as CHCV. Since the pagination of the final report was not consecutive but followed the pagination given by each study, it will be referenced as follows: Author's name, CHCV, page number.

⁶ 'El fracaso de la Comisión,' in *Revista Semana*, 2 May 2015. According to the journalist A. Sierra, the truth of the conflict needs to be a public truth, and for him such a report was indigestible. Álvaro Sierra Restrepo, 'La paz en 809 páginas no es digerible,' in *El Tiempo*, 12 Feb 2015.

recent history. Indeed, the major area of disagreement was the chronology, nature and meaning of *la Violencia*. Three of the twelve specialists considered that the armed conflict in Colombia started in 1964, so they hardly mentioned *la Violencia*.⁷ For others, the on-going conflict started with *la Violencia* — a conflict synonymous with the history of peasantry's struggle for land since the mid-1920s.⁸

According to this view, *la Violencia* was the period between 1925 and 1955.⁹ Gutiérrez, who called it a 'war of extermination', pointed out that the inability to define and settle legal rights of rural property was a precondition but not the main trigger of *la Violencia*.¹⁰ Jorge Giraldo described it as the period of 1946–1957 which began a 'bloodthirsty tradition' of power against vulnerable peasantry.¹¹ His chronology coincided with De Zubiria's chronology.¹² For Pecaut, *la Violencia* started in 1946, but reached its full dimension in 1949 and 1950 when the death toll rose to 18,500 and 50,000 respectively.¹³

Although Wills looked further back to the nineteenth century, she concluded that *la Violencia* was the period between 1950 and 1953. Vega contextualised *la Violencia* within the subordination of Colombian politics to USA continental interests. Based on a large bibliography and documents disclosed by the Central Intelligence Agency and Department of State's Office of Intelligence Research, Vega dated *la Violencia* between the Tratado Interamericano de Asistencia Recíproca (1947) and the USA military mission of William P. Yarborough in Colombia, 1962. Vega emphasised more than the

⁷ Torrijos, Duncan and Jorge Giraldo. 'El conflicto tiene su origen en 1964, cuando los comandantes de las FARC y el ELN toman la decisión de desafiar al Estado.' Torrijos, CHCV, 4.

⁸ Molano, CHCV, 2; Fajardo, CHCV, 3-5; Javier Giraldo, CHCV, 2-4 and De Zubiria, CHCV, 5.

⁹ 'De tal suerte que armas, presupuesto nacional, ideología y tierra, es decir, todas las formas de lucha, se convirtieron en la mezcla explosiva que llamamos la Violencia: 1925–1955.' Molano, CHCV, 2.

¹⁰ 'Ambas oleadas están orgánicamente conectadas (ver sección 3) y muestran muchas continuidades, pero son distintas en sus protagonistas, principales motivos, y lógicas subyacentes.' Gutiérrez, CHCV, 1-5.

¹¹ Jorge Giraldo, CVCH, 2.

¹² De Zubiria CHCV, 14.

¹³ Daniel Pecaut, CHCV, 24. Cfr. Pecaut, *Orden y violencia: Colombia 1930–1953*, 4th ed. (Medellín: Fondo Editorial Universidad Eafit, 2012), 501.

other specialists that the socio-political violence in general, and *la Violencia* in particular, was an outcome of the implementation of the capitalist model.

The CHCV's conclusions about the nature and meaning of *la Violencia* questioned much more than the chronology. Torrijos considered that the guerrilla groups were a destabilising factor in an otherwise functional and perfectible democracy.¹⁴ Thus the State had been the victim of both rebellious armed organisations and 'non-armed insurgency' — both equally disloyal to a rather generous State. This argument led Torrijos to justify systematic military action against civilians.¹⁵ In contrast, most of the analyses referred to *la Violencia* as the origin of a 'socio-political armed conflict'.¹⁶ However, the disparity between the 'objective' and 'subjective' causes analysed by each author, and the values they attributed to these causes, made it impossible to reach more than a few too general conclusions.¹⁷ However, by putting together such a wide range of analyses, the report highlighted points of historical disagreement and the arguments lying behind them.

As the official narratives, so long taken for granted, are now coming under criticism, it is worth going back to reconsider the arguments of those who challenged them originally. As early as 1962, Fals-Borda's ethical analysis not only demythologised narratives but also questioned the official version according to which *la Violencia* was a barbaric conflict between Liberal and Conservative peasants.

¹⁴ Torrijos, CHCV, 4.

¹⁵ Torrijos, CHCV, 38-39.

¹⁶ De Zubiría, CHCV: 2, 24, 43; Fajardo, CHCV, 1, 5, 22, 35-37; Pecaut, CHCV, 1, 3, 22-35; Molano, CHCV, 1, 3, 7, 11-22; 35-38, 42; Javier Giraldo CHCV, 1, 2, 8, 13- 25, 34-38; Estrada, CHCV, 1, 5, 18-20, 37; Vega, CHCV, 1-3; Wills, CHCV, 1, 5-6. 36-42.

¹⁷ Pizarro Leongómez, CHCV, 1-5.

Those who put Fals-Borda's early career in the pigeonhole of orthodox functionalism would have had problems understanding both the historical meaning and also the impact of this study when it was published in 1962. Even now, nobody has systematically explained why and to what extent functionalism was a problem or a limitation in itself: this will be discussed in the closing chapter of this thesis.

This chapter, which analyses Fals-Borda's approach to the political dimension of the moral crisis underlying *la Violencia*, is divided into three parts. The first presents a brief context of the assassination of the leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán and its impact on both the capital, Bogotá, and the provinces — what Fals-Borda called 'the short revolution of 1948'.¹⁸ The second part examines one aspect of Fals-Borda's background which influenced the way he questioned the moral crisis of *la Violencia*, namely, his ethnographic approach to rural communities. This element enabled Fals-Borda to examine the 'moral crisis' after *la Violencia* in a new light. Third, this chapter analyses Fals-Borda's understanding of the moral crisis underlying *la Violencia* and the subsequent socio-cultural process of disintegration and reintegration. This section will also consider Camilo Torres's important analysis of *la Violencia*, which was initially meant to be part of the second volume of LVC, 1963.¹⁹

Along with Fals-Borda's published writing on *la Violencia* and a large secondary bibliography, the previously unknown notebooks about his trips to different regions of

¹⁸ Fals-Borda, *Subversion and Social Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 119.

¹⁹ Camilo Torres, 'Violence and Socio-Cultural Change in Rural Colombia,' and 'Two Subcultures,' in *Father Camilo Torres. Revolutionary Writings*, ed., Maurice Zeitlin (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1972). See also the letters from Fals-Borda to Camilo Torres, Aaron Liman, Eugen Havens, Germán Guzmán, José Gutierrez, Andrew Pearse and Eduardo Umaña Luna on 29 March, 26 October and 2 November 1963 with regard to the publication of the second volume. In these letters Fals-Borda maintains that due to the intensification of the violence in various areas of the country, their work as social researchers is still incomplete. He adds: 'Desgraciadamente, solo el Padre Camilo Torres ha cumplido la promesa de entregar el manuscrito sobre la violencia, para el Segundo tomo de la serie, que debe aparecer lo más pronto posible.' Archivo Central e Histórico Universidad Nacional, Fondo Acumulado Facultad de Sociología (ACH-UN, FAFS), 1962-1963, Box 1460, Folder 04_46-52, 57-62.

the country between 1958 and 1962 have been analysed. They bear witness to both Fals-Borda's ethnographic skills and his concern for the peasantry hit by *la Violencia*. Using his critical analysis of this phenomenon, this chapter aims to address the discussion about *la Violencia* from the direction of what J. Tosh calls 'the rationale of popular knowledge about the past'.²⁰

1. Gaitán and the days of revolution

In 2007, Fals-Borda was honoured as the Martin Diskin Oxfam America Commemorative Conference Speaker. In this talk he recalled that his method Participatory Action-Research 'had a demonic midwife: ancestral political violence that climaxed in the "bogotazo" of 1948'.²¹ For him and his friends of the Presbyterian Youth Centre in Barranquilla, the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán had, as he remembered, a devastating effect: 'Nuestro idealismo había empezado a agrietarse y a desvanecerse con las ráfagas de la violencia que no han cesado en el país, lo cual me creó, al mismo tiempo angustia y esperanza sobre la patria común'.²²

Later on, as sociologist, his writing about this period did not dwell on the biographical elements of the leader assassinated but on Gaitán's ideological influence in the development of the grassroots groups' struggle during and after *la Violencia*. Indeed, according to Fals-Borda, despite people's interpretation of *la Violencia* in terms of traditional political parties, the vitality of the *Gaitanista* movement was key in understanding the link between the *bogotazo* and the events immediately leading up to

²⁰ Social memory, says Tosh, continuous to be essential means of sustaining a politically active identity. John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, 5th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 3-4.

²¹ Fals-Borda, 'Action Research in the Convergence of Disciplines,' *International Journal of Action Research*, vol. 9 no. 2 (2013): 162.

²² ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos Personales, sub-folder Iglesia Presbiteriana. Música Coral_22.

la Violencia. Thus, the reverberations of Gaitán's death as felt in the provinces was more important than the events in Bogotá; however, not until the mid-1980s did this aspect receive wider attention. The first of the following sections introduces Gaitán's political activity as leader of the Liberal Party. The second one looks at what Fals-Borda called 'the short revolution' in the provinces.

1.1. 'Who killed Jorge Eliécer Gaitán?'

This is the question that has haunted Colombian historians ever since the popular leader was assassinated on 9 April 1948. The first version, broadcast by the fanatical *Gaitanista* and radio presenter Romulo Guzmán, was that Gaitán had been killed by a Conservative policeman under official orders. President Ospina announced via the official media that Gaitán was the victim of a Communist plot, which was confirmed by the U.S. General George Marshall, who was in Bogotá attending the Pan-American Conference. Some held the young Cuban, Fidel Castro, who had interviewed Gaitán two days before his death, to be responsible for the crime.²³

Former Liberal presidents Lopez (1934–1938; 1942–1945) and Santos (1938–1942), both in New York, declared to the United Press that the events in Bogotá after Gaitán's death were 'an outbreak of popular indignation', 'a moment of madness', and 'by no means yet another Latin American revolution' (*El Espectador*, 13 April 1948). This was an attempt to distance the Liberal Party from accusations in both the national and international press — such as the U.S. newspaper chain Scripps Howard, whose front

²³ Fidel Castro was in Bogotá as organiser of the University Student Conference to counter the Pan-American Conference presided over by General Marshall and gathered in the city since 30 March. This version was seconded by the UK Foreign Office. See *Memorias de Onda Larga*, Archive National Radio. Accessed 9 April 2015. <http://www.senalmemoria.gov.co/index.php/home/historias-de-radio/item/85-la-horrible-noche>

page read: 'The reds in Colombia'. According to this newspaper chain, the riots in Bogotá were a Communist sabotage against the Pan-American Conference (13 April 1948). A decade later, declarations by John Mepples Espirito, a CIA agent, gave a basis to the theory that it was a plot woven by the CIA with the participation of the national political elites.²⁴ Three decades after Gaitán's assassination, the CIA's declassified material denied any Communist involvement in his death.²⁵ Although a sea of speculation still surrounds Gaitán's death, it is beyond doubt that his murder marked a turning point in the history of Colombia.

In 1945, as leader of the left wing of the Liberal Party, Gaitán had been proclaimed by the Liberal Party's national convention as 'the people's candidate' for the elections of 1946. However, the party's elite cold-shouldered his candidacy as well as that of Gabriel Turbay as official candidate. To accentuate the division within the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party also backed Gaitán's candidacy at first; however, in a last-minute strategic move, the Conservatives launched their own candidate, Mariano Ospina Pérez.²⁶ The latter won the ballot with 565,939 votes for the period 1946–1950 against a Liberal Party whose majority vote was split between two candidates.²⁷ Gaitán obtained

²⁴ Arturo Alape, 'La Confesión del Agente Espirito,' *El Tiempo*, 15 October 2000.

²⁵ Douglas Sofer 'Gaitán y la CIA: la evidencia,' *Revista Semana*, 5 July 2001.

²⁶ The antagonism between the Liberal upper class and Gaitán's leadership has been analysed in: Christopher Abel, *Política, Iglesia y Partidos en Colombia: 1886–1953* (Bogotá: FAES: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1987), 141-152; Daniel Pecaut, *Orden y violencia*, 376-419; Herbert Braun, *Mataron a Gaitán: vida pública y violencia urbana en Colombia*, 1987. Reprint (Bogotá: Aguilar, 2008), 209-249; and a series of lectures published in *Mataron a Gaitán: 60 años*, ed. César Augusto Ayala Diago et al. (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Dirección Académica, 2010).

²⁷ In fact, during the short period the Conservatives had supported his candidacy, he won over a good many voters for his party. Even policemen sent to watch over Gaitán's speeches ended up as *Gaitanistas*. See Carlos Miguel Ortiz, 'Gaitán y el conflicto colombiano de 1948 a 2008,' in *Mataron a Gaitán: 60 años*, 330-331; Absalón Jiménez, 'La ciudadanía y el fenómeno del gaitanismo como demanda de inclusión democrática,' in *Mataron a Gaitán: 60 años*, 319.

358,957 votes and Turbay obtained 441,199 votes, including those of the Communist Party, whose ideological dispute with Gaitán had aligned them with the official candidate.²⁸

Unlike Turbay, for whom that defeat ended his political career, Gaitán's popular support was a triumph. In 1947, his Liberal Popular Movement (MPL) obtained a majority in the mid-term elections, confirming him as the outright leader of the Liberal Party and unchallenged candidate for the presidential elections of 1950.²⁹ His political platform of 1947 called *Plan Gaitán*, despite its serious political contradictions, was an attempt to appeal to both the rural and the urban electorates.³⁰ It was a programme 'liberal in political terms, socialist in economic terms, and based on popular support, regardless of people's political affiliation, against the oligarchy'.³¹ In the light of the Conservative government's anti-communist policies, a sector of the Communist Party and a number of unions backed Gaitán's political platform. *Gaitanismo's* overwhelming mid-term electoral victory in 1947 accentuated his antagonism with his opponents, both Liberals and Conservatives, in the Congress and the industrial and agrarian oligarchy.³²

²⁸ According to Gilberto Vieira, General Secretary of the Communist Party: 'El Partido ha admitido que ese fue uno de sus más graves errores; yo personalmente creo que fue el más grave error que ha cometido el Partido Comunista. ¿Por qué? Porque el partido tenía una idea clara que si ganaban los conservadores íbamos a tener un régimen fachista en Colombia porque el Partido Conservador se había *fachistizado* como decíamos en la segunda guerra mundial y, exclusivamente en la Guerra Española, era absolutamente solidario con el general Franco, etc, etc.' Viera, interviewed by Diego Jaramillo, 1996, published in Diego Jaramillo, 'Legado socialista de Gaitán,' in *Mataron a Gaitán: 60 años*, 359.

²⁹ MPL for its initials in Spanish of Movimiento Popular del Liberalismo.

³⁰ Pecaú defined Gaitán's populism as an unprecedented social mobilisation in pursuit of a traditional political strategy. Pecaú, *Orden y violencia*, 493. For his part, Christopher Abel saw Gaitán's political contradictions in his call to insurrection that he combined with his deeply rooted constitutionalism. Abel, *Política, Iglesia y Partidos*, 142. For Herbert Braun, Gaitán's contradictions were the reflection of the inner contradiction of the consociational practices in Colombian politics. Herbert Braun, *Mataron a Gaitán*, 380-385. In this vein, also Fernán González, *Poder y violencia en Colombia* (Bogotá: CINEP-ODECOFI, 2014), 276-280.

³¹ Luis Emiro Valencia, *El pensamiento económico de Jorge Eliecer Gaitán* (Bogotá: Ediciones Desde Abajo, 2008), 101.

³² Gaitán intentionally avoided Marxist categories. He used *pueblo* against oligarchy (the industrial and agrarian elite consisting of twelve families, among them the President's, and the 3% of proprietors who owned 50% of cultivated land). What Gaitán called *pueblo* was all those groups subjected to a system of domination by a political and economic oligarchy, which implies something different from the Marxist notion of class: 'sujetos biológicos disminuidos (con hambre, desnutrición, enfermedad) y subconsumidores del mercado y de servicios (sin agua potable, sin poder de compra, sin acceso a colegios pagos) que debían ser salvados.' Carlos Ortiz, 'Gaitán y el conflicto colombiano,' 330-331.

Gaitán's agenda, widely disseminated and discussed in both his newspaper *Jornada* and his weekly speech in the municipal theatre, was not the ruling class's only concern.³³ In the wake of increasing violence by Conservative local authorities against Liberals in rural areas, Gaitán reverted to popular mobilisation as the means to consolidate political legitimacy. The *Gaitanista* movement, with its multitudinous gatherings attended equally by Liberals and Conservatives, challenged the functional equivalents of segmental division along class, religion and ethnic lines that had identified the traditional bipartisan system in Colombia. Gaitán declared his fight to be also on behalf of the people betrayed by the promises of previous Liberal governments, which delivered a hard blow to the Liberals who ruled for sixteen years, 1930–1946, after half a century of Conservative hegemony.³⁴ As John Green pointed out, '*Gaitanista* ideology sprang from its followers' collective understanding of the world and their shared notions of how it ought to be ... So it constituted a popularly grounded system of belief that oriented a radical mobilization. The contest was becoming one between the *pueblo* and the oligarchy.'³⁵

As leader of the Liberal Party, Gaitán avoided acting outside a democratic framework and refrained from imposing a class identity on his movement. His idea of socialism was anti-seigneurial rather than anti-capitalist — a Republic of small proprietors, which was closer to Proudhon's socialism than to Marx's.³⁶ What was revolutionary, in the elites' eyes, was those unprecedented mass mobilisations. On 18 July 1947, after the mass killing of Liberals in Tolima, Gaitán organised the *Marcha de las Antorchas*

³³ In contrast to Argentina or Uruguay where the circulation of daily newspapers corresponded to one copy per each seven inhabitants in 1943, in Colombia the percentage was one copy per every fifty inhabitants. Therefore, taking into consideration the figure of 57% for illiteracy in Colombia, the circulation of *Jornada*, whose readers were mostly workers, was significant. Adriana Rodríguez Franco, 'El Gaitanismo y los gaitanistas de *Jornada* (1944–1948),' in *Mataron a Gaitán: 60 años*, 117–121.

³⁴ Gaitán, Speech 15 Feb 1948. Accessed 9 April 2015.

<http://www.senalmemoria.gov.co/index.php/home/historias-de-radio/item/83-radio-de-los-desrozos>

³⁵ John Green, 'Vibrations of the Collective: The popular ideology of Gaitanismo on Colombia's Atlantic Coast, 1944–1948,' *Hispanic American Historical Review* vol. 76, no. 2 (1996): 285.

³⁶ Gonzalo Sánchez, 'El Personaje, el evento, el legado,' in *Mataron a Gaitán: 60 años*, 369.

(Torch demonstration), which was denounced by the Conservative Press as a threatening demonstration, simulating Mussolini's March on Rome in October 1922. (Gaitán had studied for his PhD in Law in the University of Rome, 1926–1927).³⁷ On 7 February 1948, Gaitán brought together his supporters in the *Marcha del Silencio* (Silent demonstration). For hours a multitude followed Gaitán through the streets of Bogotá in absolute silence holding black flags in a sign of mourning for the Liberal partisans' deaths at the hands of the Conservative regime.³⁸ Gaitán, after a few words asking President Ospina to call a halt to violence against the Liberals, ordered the multitude to return home in absolute silence, which they did. If the *Marcha del Silencio* had finished in a riot, which was exactly what the government had expected to happen, then the political elite would not have had much reason to be scared.

Nationwide support made Gaitán himself the channel between 'the political country' (the institutions) and 'the national country' (the people) — herein lies Gaitán's political relevance but also the *Gaitanista* movement's failure.³⁹ Two months later, Gaitán was killed. For the people 'it meant the death of all hope'.⁴⁰ His death was followed by the outbreak of violence and became inextricably associated with images of furious crowds wielding machetes, looting businesses and vandalising administrative and ecclesiastical buildings in the centre of Bogotá, which provided the backdrop for an opposing

³⁷ His thesis, 'El criterio positivo de la premeditación', directed by renowned Jurist Enrico Ferri, obtained Magna Cum Laude.

³⁸ The day after twenty Liberals were killed when the army opened fire against a crowd demonstrating against political violence in the cities of Manizales and Pereira. *Gaitán, el Bogotazo y la Historia de una Ilusión*, directed by Mauricio Acosta (Bogotá: Caracol TV, The History Channel Latin America and Mazdoc Documentaries, 2008).

³⁹ This was, according to Pecaú, the germ of *Gaitanista* populism's self-destruction. Pecaú, *Orden y violencia*, 491.

⁴⁰ Gonzalo Sanchez, 'El personaje, el evento, el legado,' 383.

interpretation: 9 April 1948 was portrayed as the day when a sacrilegious Communist plot, executed by *Gaitanistas*' hands, destroyed Bogotá.⁴¹

1.2. The short revolution of 1948

Bogotá, as was thoroughly documented and illustrated in Arturo Alape's *El Bogotazo* (1987), was certainly the epicentre of the uprising in 1948. The seizure of the National Radio Station (*Radiodifusora Nacional*) and the creation of the *Junta Central Revolucionaria* on the spur of the moment are essential in understanding how the event unfolded.⁴² However, whilst Bogotá was under military control before evening and the *Gaitanistas* were waiting for either a negotiated takeover or orders from the mutineering Fifth Brigade to engage in action, local revolutionary *juntas* across the country had seized Conservative local governments.⁴³ The *Junta Central*'s call for the creation of local revolutionary juntas, through the National Radio Station had an immediate response in the medium-sized and small cities, in which Gaitán's anti-oligarchic discourse had been wholeheartedly embraced.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Conferencia Episcopal de Colombia, Pastoral Colectiva 13 April 1948 (*la Republica*, 14 April 1948); Darío Acevedo, *La Mentalidad de las élites sobre la Violencia en Colombia (1936–1949)* (Bogotá: El Ancora Editores, 1995), 161.

⁴² The *Junta* was formed by the head of the National University, Gerardo Molina, the writer Jorge Zalamea and the poet Jorge Gaitán Durán. See Arturo Alape, 'El 9 de Abril en provincia,' in *Nueva Historia de Colombia*, vol. 2, ed. Álvaro Tirado Mejía (Bogotá: Planeta, 1989), 35–37.

⁴³ There is no detailed account of cities, towns and villages overtaken by the Revolutionary *Juntas*; however, the figures brought up by the following authors suggest an uprising of national dimensions: Guzmán, et al., *La Violencia en Colombia*; Gonzalo Sánchez, *Los días de la revolución. Gaitanismo y el 9 de abril en provincia* (Bogotá: Centro cultural Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, 1983); John Green, 'Vibrations of the Collective;' as well as Ana María Lara, 'Las Joyas de la Corona: 9 de abril, en la penumbra, pero con radio.' Archivo Señal Memoria, RTVC. Accessed 10 April 2015, <http://www.senalmemoria.gov.co/index.php/home/las-joyas-de-la-corona/item/1907-las-joyas-de-la-corona-9-de-abril>

⁴⁴ During the years preceding *la Violencia*, radio played an essential role. As Christopher Abel pointed out, the listeners of the radio programme 'Últimas Noticias' reached a million whilst the edition of the newspaper *El Tiempo* were of 300,000 copies. Abel, *Política, Iglesia y Partidos*, 216.

Once the National Radio Station was occupied by the army, the key protagonists operated from improvised radio stations which transmitted all night long in a desperate attempt to organise the revolution whilst the Liberal leadership was still negotiating with President Ospina. These clandestine radio stations broadcast news informing of a successful revolution in Bogotá, as a result of which dozens of local *juntas* were improvised so as to join the alleged national revolution.⁴⁵ Thus, on the morning of 10 April there was a striking contrast between the outcome of the overnight meeting of the Liberal leadership with President Ospina and the nationwide uprising led by improvised, though well organised, local *juntas*. President Ospina did not hand over but skilfully obtained an agreement of joint government, *Unión Nacional*, signed only after sixteen hours of negotiations (*El Tiempo*, 10 April 1948). In so doing the Liberal leadership, who had opposed Gaitán's candidacy, not only warded off any revolutionary attempt in the capital but also put itself at odds with the uprising. As the agreement's conclusion states: 'Los ideales de los partidos políticos no son incompatibles con la mística de la patria, y a este principio ajustarán los directorios políticos su actividad porvenir.'⁴⁶

Misled by the reports of a successful overthrow of the Conservative government in Bogotá, local leaders proceeded to depose Conservative authorities and disarm police — some of whom joined the newly instituted *juntas*' civil police. In the light of indiscriminate and vicious attacks on the Conservative population in some cities, the *juntas* ordered the detention of Conservatives in public buildings so as to protect their lives. The consumption of alcoholic drinks, rioting and pillage were totally banned. In order to preserve public order, civil police zealously patrolled the cities.

⁴⁵ Ana María Lara, 'El 9 de abril: "La radio de los destrozos",' Archivo Señal Memoria. RTVC. Accessed 11 April 2015.

<http://www.senalmemoria.gov.co/index.php/home/historias-de-radio/item/83-radio-de-los-destrozos>

⁴⁶ 'Pacto de Tregua de los Directorios Políticos,' in Alberto Lleras Restrepo, *De la República a la Dictadura*, 93.

Nevertheless, its consent to attack Conservative media and directorates was not rare. What was even more interesting was how rapidly the *juntas* managed to organise a system of provisions to support the beginning of a revolutionary struggle for the establishment of a Liberal *Gaitanista* Republic. In fact, when revolutionary *juntas* seized control of towns and labour uprisings broke out in many of the area's mining camps along the Magdalena River, 'the regional authorities were forced to reconsider their policy of restraint.'⁴⁷ In contrast to the civil wars of the nineteenth century, and in spite of its anarchic expressions, during those days — 'the days of the revolution' as Gonzalo Sánchez put it — the political elite did not have the upper hand. Both the ideological direction and the control of the military were carried out by local leadership ideologically motivated by *Gaitanista mística*.⁴⁸

The *Gaitanista* uprising did not last longer than a clap of thunder. Power was rapidly recovered in the main cities. In Cali, the third biggest city in Colombia, Colonel Rojas Pinilla, who became dictator from 1953 to 1957, made his name crushing a *Gaitanista* outbreak. Some towns resisted for days, especially those where the rebellion had the active support of the police.⁴⁹ A few places even rebelled for weeks, as in the oil enclave of Barranca where the workers took control of the refinery, compelling the government to negotiate with the local *junta*.⁵⁰ The uncoordinated action of the *juntas* posed a threat to the Conservative regime, but it failed to destabilise the bipartisan system. Although the political conflict after Gaitán's death was between *Gaitanista* masses and

⁴⁷ Mary Roldán, *Blood and Fire: La Violencia in Antioquia Colombia, 1946–1953* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 112.

⁴⁸ Juan Manuel Valdelamar, an influential labour leader, remarked that in the Colombian department of Bolívar, 'all the *campesinos* have a portrait of Gaitán in their homes, and daily they tend it with a *mística* that approaches adoration.' Quoted in John Green, *Vibrations of the Collective*; 284.

⁴⁹ Guzmán, et al, LVC, 64–65.

⁵⁰ Arturo Alape, 'El 9 de abril en provincia,' 60–62.

the Conservative government (which had been overtaken by radical elements), *la Violencia* was fought and perceived in terms of traditional partisan consciousness.⁵¹

The official Liberal leadership had seen the *Gaitanista* movement as a threat to its own interests.⁵² So, by establishing a joint government, it tried to channel a multitude of militants demanding radical reforms into the structure of traditional Colombian politics. In spite of bilateral agreements of no retaliation against the subversive local *juntas*, once the government regained control, it did repress them violently. The state of social unrest and political turmoil paved the way for the escalation of the conflict in various regions of the country and the creation of self-defence guerrillas; however, *la Violencia* was not merely the intensification of existing violence between partisan peasantry.⁵³ There is one other crucial aspect. This will be the focus of Section 3.

2. *La Violencia* and the moral question: an ethnographic framework

2.1. *La Violencia*: crisis of morality or moral crisis?

By the late 1950s, in spite of many novels based on real events, very little was known about the scale of the violence occurring in the Colombian countryside.⁵⁴ These semi-

⁵¹ For the analysis of *Gaitanista* movement as the first popular mobilisation outside the traditional bipartisan framework in different regions: Alejo Vargas, *Colonización y Conflicto armado: Magdalena medio santandereano* (1992); Mary Roldán, *Blood and Fire*; John Green, 'Vibrations of the Collective.'

⁵² Carlos Lleras Restrepo who took the reins of the Liberal Party after Gaitán's death, recalled in his memories of that day in the Hospital where Gaitán was lying dead, that they (he, Echandía and Araújo) understood that their involvement in the constitution of a Revolutionary *Junta* would have created a revolutionary state of unforeseen consequences. Alberto Lleras Restrepo, *De la República a la Dictadura*, 54.

⁵³ For many, as Pecaut stated, remaining in the guerrilla groups was the only way to avoid military courts established after the state of siege of 1949.

⁵⁴ Sixty-seven novels were written on the topic of political violence between 1946 and 1966. Mostly written by eyewitnesses, these "novelas de la Violencia" woven from facile casuistry and factionary accusations fed the popular demand for knowledge on *la Violencia*. A good deal of research has been carried out on these novels. The first academic study, although strongly partisan Conservative was Gerardo Suárez's *La Novela de la Violencia en Colombia*, PhD dissertation, UPB, 1966. More factual-based research on these novels was carried out by Gustavo Alvarez Gardeazabal, 'México y Colombia: Violencia y revolución en la novela' *Nuevo Mundo*, no. 57/58 (1971); Restrepo Laura, 'Niveles de

fictionalised accounts played a two-fold role: on the one hand, they were the first testimonies of collective memory of *la Violencia* — many of them published clandestinely due to the censorship imposed by the Conservative regime; on the other, they filled in to some degree for the lack of empirical research.⁵⁵ Herbert Braun, the biographer of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, recalls that when he was a teenager, rumours about horrendous brutality and merciless criminality were all that the people living in Bogotá heard of *la Violencia*. ‘We lived in the city,’ Braun says, ‘*la Violencia* was rural — something that happened to people that we understood to be different from us, somehow, inferior to us.’⁵⁶ Braun’s memories reflect something crucial to the understanding of *la Violencia*: in spite of the scale and of the number of civil fatalities, it was not, strictly speaking, a national catastrophe. As Fals-Borda similarly explained: ‘total collapse did not occur — the urban revolt was absent.’⁵⁷

Partisan literature, like the novels mentioned above, did see the moral crisis of *la Violencia* as a problem of individual or collective morality. In many cases, the aim of such literature, put out by Liberals and Conservative alike, was to accuse their adversaries of crimes even more repugnant than those committed by their own party.⁵⁸ Thus, by claiming legitimate self-defence as moral justification for their own party’s deeds, this partisan approach suggested that their enemies’ suffering was their own

realidad en la literatura de la “violencia colombiana” (1985), Rodríguez Nicolas, *Los vehículos de la memoria. Discursos morales durante la primera fase de la Violencia, 1946–1953* (2008); Jaime Alejandro Rodríguez Ruiz’ online project *Novela Colombiana*. Accessed 2 Dec 2015.

http://www.javeriana.edu.co/narrativa_colombiana/contenido/manual/sigloxx/xx03.htm.

⁵⁵ See Abel, *Política, Iglesia y Partidos*, 217.

⁵⁶ Herbert Braun, ‘De palabras y distinciones. Hacia un entendimiento del comportamiento cotidiano entre los colombianos durante la Violencia de los años cincuenta,’ in *La Restauración Conservadora 1946–1957*, ed., Rubén Sierra Mejía (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Facultad de Ciencias Humanas, 2012), 62.

⁵⁷ Fals-Borda, ‘The role of violence,’ 28.

⁵⁸ Literature during the 1950s that Gonzalo Sanchez called ‘apologetic’, for instance, Joaquín Estrada Monsalve, *Así fue la Revolución* (1950); Juan Roca Lemus, under the pseudonym of *Testis Fidelis*, *El basilisco en acción o los crímenes del bandolerismo* (1952); Alfonso Hilarión Sánchez, *Las balas de la Ley* (1953); Moncada Alonso, *Un aspecto de la Violencia* (Bogotá: n.p., 1963).

fault. Furthermore, some of this literature was an expression of cultural elitism or *cultura verbalista* — a tradition of erudite politicians sitting in ivory towers, concerned more with the form of the discourse than with the reality of the events they described.⁵⁹ With regard to the contrast between the intensity of the ‘verbal battle’ between the political parties and the superficial manner in which the violence was discussed, Camilo Torres wrote: ‘*la Violencia* is the complex symptom of a social situation that can be only explained in terms of many factors. But our political leaders try to cope with it, both in theory and in practice, with excessive simplicity. There is groundless dogmatizing about it.’⁶⁰

Consistent with the return of *civilismo* or politics of the gentlemen’s agreement after the establishment of the National Front in 1958, following the dictatorship of 1953–1957, the official narrative depicted the ‘moral crisis’ to be the result of atavistic violent behaviour among the popular classes, which erupted out of control immediately after the assassination of the Liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán.⁶¹ This served to explain away *la Violencia* as the result of ‘the peasantry’s natural aggressiveness and moral disorder’.⁶² President Lleras’s speech on the day he took office stated: ‘We saw with

⁵⁹ Braun wrote: ‘No pude haberme imaginado que esos dos mundos, uno el amor por las palabras y otro de arremetidas iracundas entre colombianos estaban tan íntimamente ligados.’ Herbert Braun, ‘De palabras y distinciones,’ 62.

⁶⁰ Camilo Torres, ‘Revolution: Christian Imperative,’ in *Father Camilo Torres. Revolutionary Writings*, 192.

⁶¹ For Pecaut, Colombian civilism reflected, on the one hand, a tradition of civil governments, on the other, a myth: the inability to secure the legal monopoly of the violence. Pecaut, CHCV, 2015, 20.

⁶² Francisco Socarrás’s series of lectures entitled ‘Radiography of Hatred in Colombia,’ at the Colombian Society of Psychiatry during the year of 1959. According to him *la Violencia* in Tolima had as one of its main causes the inherent aggressiveness of the *Pijaos*, original inhabitants of this regions, one of the most affected by *la Violencia*. In Fals-Borda, ‘The Violence in Colombia.’ ACH-UN, FAFS, 1963, Box 1460, Folder 3_53. According to Lopez de Mesa there was a considerable disequilibrium between the intellectual groups and the masses in general. Hence, the ‘centre of gravity’ of the Colombian people ‘is very high’, in the oligarchy, which makes the structure unstable. Theory also analysed by Fals-Borda in his *Subversion and Social Change*, 27-28.

amazement how there had been a reserve of savagery in our people which defied entire centuries of Christian preaching, of civil order, and of advanced communal existence.’⁶³

As a researcher of the rural world, Fals-Borda was able to shed light on the moral crisis from a completely different angle. His previous historical analysis of the ‘land–man problem’ enabled him to theorise about the chronic cultural and economic stagnation of rural areas, conditions which proved to be explosive with the onset of *la Violencia*.

However, socio-historical analysis was only one of the aspects that formed the complex background against which Fals-Borda approached the problem. One more aspect, overlooked more often than not, was significantly relevant: his knowledge of the human reality of the Colombian rural world.

2.2. Fals-Borda’s ethnographic basis of his approach to *la Violencia*

Fals-Borda approached the rural world realistically though not dispassionately. His empirical and historical knowledge of reality was inseparable from the fortunes of the rural population. His concern can be seen at its best in Fals-Borda’s ethnographic notebooks. As J. Rappaport has pointed out, Fals-Borda was a skilful ethnographer; however, this facet of his work has been neglected hitherto.⁶⁴ In fact, Fals-Borda’s first publication was not sociological but ethnographic. It was the description of a trip to the *Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta* which he made when he was at secondary school. His

⁶³ President Alberto Lleras, 7 August 1958, in Fals-Borda, ‘The role of violence,’ 28. Also, López de Mesa Luis, 1962, ‘Un historial de la Violencia’: ‘la violencia no es más que la manifestación superlativa del desorden moral íntimo de nuestra gente, el superlativo de un defecto nacional.’ ACH-UNC, FAFS, 1963, Box 1460, Folder 4_24.

⁶⁴ Joanne Rappaport, ‘El cobarde no hace historia: Orlando Fals-Borda y la doble historia de la costa del Caribe’ (Paper presented at a seminar in CINEP, Bogotá, 7 July 2015).

memories about writing this article are some of the few fragments written by himself on his own childhood.

Al pastor Libreros debo mi primer viaje por el caño del Clarín y salida por mar hasta Santa Marta en una de las lanchas del puerto fluvial ... cuando fuimos hasta Minca para subir a pie hasta Cerro Quemado, en la Sierra Nevada. Fui el único que llevó un diario de campo, donde cada noche fui anotando lo que observaba y datos varios de población y altura sobre el nivel del mar. No recuerdo de dónde me salió la idea, pero fui escrupuloso. Lo cierto es que allí brotó mi primer trabajo etnográfico. Resultó tan presentable, que mi papá lo llevó al diario La Prensa para publicarlo, lo cual se hizo. Tal fue mi primera salida como autor.⁶⁵

His ability as an ethnographer was also fruitfully deployed in his first academic works.

Frederick Gowen, professor of the Institute of Agriculture of Minnesota University, wrote to Fals-Borda regarding his Master's dissertation on the Peasants of the Andes: 'You have a compelling style which combined with remarkable objectivity kept me reading your book all the way through even though I was only planning to read the chapter in my field, agriculture.'⁶⁶

Whilst working for Winston Brothers Company, the newly graduated sociologist Fals-Borda started his career as a participant-observer. Soon after, when he moved in to live with a family in Saucío, who, as he remembered, adopted him, he became fully embedded in the community.⁶⁷ At the very least, it meant accepting the ordinary conditions of life endured by the populace being studied, as Goulet explained: 'In Saucío, Fals-Borda performed farm chores and dressed in the typical *ruana* (a kind of poncho), boots and khaki pants. He even altered his mode of speech so as to eliminate

⁶⁵ Fals-Borda, 'Mis primeros años,' in *Una sociología sentipensante para América Latina. Antología*, by Fals-Borda, ed., Víctor Manuel Moncayo (Bogotá: CLACSO: Siglo del Hombre Editores, 2009), 27.

⁶⁶ F. Gowen enclosed a copy of Fals-Borda's dissertation noting a few typing or word errors. As Gowen wrote: 'I enjoyed it too much to be helpfully critical, I am afraid. I expected something good but this is much better than I expected.' Letter on 20 July 1953. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, Sub-folder libro_Peasant_Society_33. See also Fals-Borda, 'Acknowledgements,' in *Peasant Society*, xi.

⁶⁷ *Historia Debida*. Fals-Borda interviewed by Alfredo Molano, part 1, directed by U.N. Television (Original broadcast on 22 February 1995; Bogotá: Canal Uno, 1995).

traces of class superiority in his dealing with peasants.’⁶⁸ Telling his brother about the new job at Winston Brothers Company, Fals-Borda wrote: ‘En esta forma permanezco en contacto con los campesinos, a quienes deseo conocer mejor antes de emprender ningún proyecto sociológico de mi propia iniciativa.’⁶⁹

The same interest was expressed in his acceptance letter for the job at STACA. Despite not being appointed as a rural sociologist, as such a position did not exist, Fals-Borda expected his job to let him act like one: ‘I also hope that I will be able to maintain a personal and first-hand contact with rural realities in Boyacá ... I think you agree with me that such a contact is essential for our work.’⁷⁰ Two years later, after his resignation from STACA to work in the Inter-American Housing Centre (CINVA), he wrote to Lowry Nelson: ‘I like my new job much better, as it gives me more opportunities to study rural communities in different parts of Colombia.’⁷¹ Consequently, before writing his analysis of *la Violencia*, Fals-Borda had compiled a great many notes about local traditions, the geography, the vegetation, the fauna, the system of production, the landscape and the people he talked to.⁷² On his trips, especially those to Cundinamarca, Tolima and Huila, where *la Violencia* had the most devastating effects (see next section and Chapter 3), Fals-Borda described people’s situation as desperate. Despite their hard

⁶⁸ Denis Goulet, *A New Moral Order. Studies in Development Ethics and Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1974), 58-59.

⁶⁹ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Instituto_Antropología_Social_Colombia_9.

⁷⁰ Letter to Guadalupe Ramirez, United States of America Operations Mission to Colombia on 13 June 1955. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Datos Personales, Sub-folder Servicio_Técnico_Agrícola_Colombiano_Americano_STACA_02.

⁷¹ Letter to Lowry Nelson on 20 July 1957. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, Sub-folder University_Minnesota_32.

⁷² Notebooks ‘Nariño’ (1957); ‘Viaje a los Llanos’ (1958); ‘Cunday’ (1962); ‘Antioquia: Regiones de Bolívar y Carmen de Atrato’ (Febrero 1958); ‘Antioquia Suroriental: Yarumal, y parte Norte de Antioquia’ (1962); ‘Estudio Demográfico del Cauca, preparado para la División Técnica de Seguridad Social Campesina del Ministerio de Trabajo’ (1958); ‘Vereda de Chambimbal, Buga’ a study of rural housing (1958). ‘Macheta, Cundinamarca, Vereda San Isidro’ (1964); Photographic materials studies: *Fragmentation of Holdings in Boyaca, Colombia* (1956); ‘La Vivienda Tropical Humeda’ (1958); ‘Pescadores de Tumaco y Buenaventura’ (1971, the Rosca Foundation). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Visiones_de_Colombia, 15 sub-folders.

work on the big estates, the peasantry lived in abject poverty: ‘el problema es el hambre ... y no tienen derecho a sembrar nada ni a tener bestias ni marranos, cosa que irrita al campesino.’⁷³ In spite of the political agreement between the two parties, fears of the return of *la Violencia* were still present across the country.

His trip to the Llanos Orientales, one of the strongholds of guerrilla resistance, amazed him. As he wrote: ‘admira y sobrecoge la expansión interminable, la variedad de la fauna, la puesta y la salida del sol, la luna roja llena las noches estrelladas y la brisa constante.’⁷⁴ This vast and fertile, though inhospitable, region that Fals-Borda described as having the greatest agricultural potential of the country, was also the scene of a massive colonisation by families uprooted by *la Violencia* — an area in which the presence of the state was non-existent but which was by no means devoid of law. Fals-Borda listened to the stories of Guadalupe Salcedo, the guerrilla fighter who brought order and justice to the region after ‘the war’ (as they called *la Violencia*).⁷⁵ A region inhabited by brave people, he said: ‘no temen al enfrentarse como lo hacen a los elementos, a los mosquitos, fieras, y a sus enemigos políticos o usurpadores. Prima el espíritu de pionero, el de resistencia física y espiritual. No se tiene miedo a matar si es necesario, para defender lo propio.’⁷⁶ This was for Fals-Borda, the discovery of one of the many ‘Colombias’ which formed the country; totally different from the Colombian Andes, which he had researched.

⁷³ Fals-Borda, ‘Cunday’ (notebook, 1962). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Visiones_de_Colombia, Sub-folder Notas_Viaje_Cunday_30-37.

⁷⁴ Fals-Borda, ‘Viaje a los Llanos’ (notebook, 1958). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Visiones_de_Colombia, Sub-folder Llanos_Orientales_12.

⁷⁵ Only the decisive influence of the Liberal politician Juan Lozano stopped short a new outbreak of *la Violencia* after Guadalupe’s murder. Fals-Borda, ‘Viaje a los Llanos’ (notebook, 1958). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Visiones_de_Colombia, Sub-folder Llanos_Orientales_30.

⁷⁶ Fals-Borda, ‘Viaje a los Llanos’ (notebook, 1958). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Visiones_de_Colombia, Sub-folder Llanos_Orientales_10-11.

Contact with people was also the means to fight against cultural and social prejudices and hence provide facts to the academic and political leadership concerning people's potentialities for organised action. Herein lies the meaning of Fals-Borda's notion of development, which was by no means simply concerned with technical improvements. As Fals-Borda wrote to Lynn Smith: 'I hope that you will like the report, especially for the evidence gathered that these peasants are people with initiative, with potentialities of inventiveness, and able to exercise drive once convinced of the benefits.' And he concluded: 'This is like discovering a gold mine under the dirt: discovering the great potentialities of our people.'⁷⁷

The discovery Fals-Borda talks about is not simply the people's good qualities, which he had already prized in the final chapter of his *Peasant Society* (1955).⁷⁸ It refers to a new ethos of action, whose emergence he had fostered after years working with the community of Saucío; an ethos in which, according to Fals-Borda, lies one of the deepest meanings of socio-cultural change.⁷⁹ By jointly analysing social structure and cultural traditions, Fals-Borda had discovered that behind peasants' resistance to change lay a deep rooted relationship between man and the land, which he called the peasantry's philosophy of life.⁸⁰ Therefore, his activity as ethnographer was not only a method of collecting information but a way of getting to know the human dimension of

⁷⁷ Letter to Lynn Smith on 17 Feb 1958. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, Sub-folder University_Florida_58. After almost a decade from the beginning of his project in Saucío, Fals-Borda wrote: 'it is premature to document thoroughly the direction that change is taking in Saucío ... [it] may need many more years to reach this evolutionary stage, if there is no reversal in its present rationalistic impulse'. Fals-Borda, *Facts and theory of sociocultural change in a rural social system* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Departamento de Sociología, 1959), 36.

⁷⁸ 'The farmers' hospitability and agreeableness of nature, their dogged constancy, their hard-working faculties, their objectivity in regard to the practical aspects of life, the sense of security and harmony which they have learned to find in their own neighbourhood, their faith in the Eternal'. Fals-Borda, *Peasant Society*, 246.

⁷⁹ Fals-Borda, *La Teoría y la realidad del cambio*, 67.

⁸⁰ 'Ethos y las prácticas rudimentarias son expresiones sociales que perpetúan la agricultura como una forma de vivir antes que, como una forma de explotación económica, llegan a saturar toda la estructura social, a determinar la rapidez de sus cambios y a formar el tamiz por el que habrán de pasar las innovaciones.' Fals-Borda, 'El vínculo con la tierra y su evolución en el departamento de Nariño,' *Revista Academia Colombiana de Ciencias* vol. X, no. 41 (1959): ix.

a social reality since only by understanding such a concept of life could the peasantry's potentialities be channelled into constructive ends.

Therefore, what F. Gowen calls 'compelling style,' reflects not only Fals-Borda's ethnographic ability to describe rural life vividly but also his sympathetic understanding of the rural population and their problems. Fals-Borda himself recalled to what extent the contact with the people influenced his work: 'Two experiments were conducted together with CINVA, one in Tabio and another one in Saucío. The one in Saucío was successful, the other one in Tabio was not. Why? I believe it was because of the relationship of love that I had with the people. Because of the ties. There are two works that I have written with love: one is *Peasant Society* and the other one is *Historia Doble de la Costa*.'⁸¹

On 12 February 1958 Fals-Borda wrote to Lynn Smith: 'I am taking up the study [on social change and technical improvement in the rural community of Saucío] with the Minister of Agriculture one of these days, in an attempt to secure more backing for the program. We all feel that we are hitting on a very significant problem.'⁸² In 1959, in spite of his lack of confidence in 'the king's palace', Fals-Borda channelled his knowledge of the problems of the rural life into institutional projects.⁸³ He accepted an appointment as a vice-minister of Agriculture. The ideal of arriving at a 'scientific legislation' fostered by an intelligent and skilled leadership able to meet both social

⁸¹ Lola Cendales et al, 'One sows the seed, but it has its own dynamics: An interview with Orlando Fals-Borda,' *International Journal of Action Research* 1, no.1 (2005): 26.

⁸² As Fals-Borda wrote to Lynn Smyth: 'I know it is a great satisfaction to you to see what has taken place in Saucío; it is an accomplishment of which you may be proud. Even I get a great deal of comfort from what is going on, for I consider it to be documentation, almost of an experimental nature, of the validity of one of my more important theses.' After these achievements, Fals-Borda planned the foundation of an Instituto de Investigaciones Tecnológicas, which did not happen. Letter on 12 September 1958. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Universidades, Sub-folder University_Florida_58-59.

⁸³ 'The King's palace' refers to the circles of the elite. Epigraph of his MA dissertation. *Peasant Society*. See Chapter 1, section 2.

problems with integrity and to work on far-sighted policies, which he had envisioned in 1949, proved to be even more relevant one decade later in the aftermath of *la Violencia*. At the same time, he, along with Camilo Torres, founded the School of Sociology of the National University.

3. The moral question: an interpretative essay

In 1962, defying the curtain of silence drawn over the country's immediate past, Fals-Borda, Dean of the new Faculty of Sociology of the National University, Monsignor Germán Guzmán and the lawyer Eduardo Umaña published *La Violencia en Colombia* (LVC). This research was the first comprehensive analysis of the violence unleashed during the 1950s. With its comprehensive chronology and painstaking description of the scale of national violence, and of regional outbreaks and historical antecedents, LVC remained until the late 1970s the only empirical source for academic research on *la Violencia*. For almost two decades most studies were merely interpretations of the voluminous primary information compiled in this 'book-archive,' as Sánchez called it.⁸⁴

The participation of Monsignor Guzmán in this research was of the utmost relevance. His work as a priest had not only been in the heart of one of the most affected areas of *la Violencia* but also, as a member of the Commission of 1958, he had facilitated fifty-two peace treaties, the demobilisation of thousands of guerrilla fighters and, more importantly for the task at hand, had kept the records of thousands of interviews with

⁸⁴ Gonzalo Sánchez, 'Los estudios sobre la Violencia: balance y perspectivas,' in *Pasado y presente de la violencia en Colombia*, eds., Gonzalo Sánchez and Ricardo Peñaranda (Medellín: La Carreta Editores, IEPRI, 2007), 21.

individuals and groups involved in the conflict all over the country.⁸⁵ As Fals-Borda recalled it:

The three of us [Umaña, Camilo Torres and Fals-Borda] made an expedition to Líbano in order to convince Monsignor Guzmán. There we saw the files and persuaded him to come to work at the School of Sociology. He fulfilled the formalities to leave the parish and came to us with all his things, and we worked together writing the first volume on violence. We did it in secret: nobody knew what we were doing because it was very delicate. We had decided to say things mentioning names, dates and places. We had all the necessary documentation at our disposal. In analyzing this work, its intensity, the nature of the conflict, the whole scheme that I had brought from functionalism broke down in my mind; you cannot explain it with the frame of reference that I had learned in my teachers' classes. As a conclusion to this volume I wrote down the first expression of my abandonment of that functionalist model.⁸⁶

LVC is formed of thirteen chapters, most of which were written by Monsignor Guzmán.

Along with the coordination of the project, Fals-Borda's contribution consisted in providing the framework, the method and writing both the introduction and the sociological analysis, Chapter 13: 'El Conflicto, *la Violencia* y la Estructura Social Colombiana'.⁸⁷

Based on Fals-Borda's socio-political analysis of *la Violencia*, written in LVC and other works, this section aims to recover the theoretical basis for comprehending the nature of the phenomenon and the moral question underlying it. As mentioned in the

⁸⁵ Jefferson Jaramillo Marin, 'La Comisión Investigadora de 1958 y la Violencia en Colombia,' *Universitas Humanistica*, no. 72 (2011): 37-62.

⁸⁶ Lola Cendales, et al., 'One sows the seed,' 24.

⁸⁷ The first part of the book (chapters 1-4) is mostly descriptive of the antecedents, history and geography of *la Violencia*. The second (chapters 5-8), focuses on the socio-anthropological aspects of the groups in conflict. Chapter 9 approaches the *tanatología* of *la Violencia* (patterns of behaviour and identification of the groups in the different ways they imposed death), and chapter 10 analyses the collapse of the socio-political institutions in Colombia. The third part, divided into three chapters, starts by discussing the consequences of *la Violencia*, to give way to the insightful chapter by Eduardo Umaña on the socio-juridical factors of impunity as the main cause of the escalation of political violence. As J. Martz points out: "The well-founded burden of his argument is the total inadequacy of the Colombian judicial system in dealing with contemporary conditions." John Martz, *Colombia: a contemporary political survey* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975), 304. The book, LVC, closes with Fals-Borda's sociological analysis of the phenomenon. This was the first of a series intended on the topic. The second and last volume was issued in 1963 (see next chapter).

Introduction, one of the key contributions of Fals-Borda to the Colombian historiography was to challenge as early as 1962 the official narratives according to which *la Violencia*, 1948–1957, was the result of the exacerbation of peasantry's savagery. His interpretation of *la Violencia* unveiled the emergence of a popular movement with overtones of class struggle in the midst of Colombia's belated modernisation — this perspective was clearer in his *Subversion and Social Change* (1967). Later on Fals-Borda's own research *Historia Doble de la Costa* dug deeper in this respect, especially regarding the Atlantic coastal departments and the towns along the Magdalena River, where Gaitán found some of his strongest support as reflected in the electoral outcomes of 1946 and 1947.⁸⁸

La Violencia, as Camilo Torres put it, 'has constituted the most important socio-cultural change in the peasant areas since the Spanish conquest'; however, its causes and consequences are not obvious.⁸⁹ Even less clear was, and still is, the significance of extensive disruption of a relatively stable peasant life that had existed throughout the colonial period, and after the Independence from Spain, 1810–1819. The description of *la Violencia* as an outbreak of horrendous brutality between the rank-and-file of the two parties does not explain the breakdown of the 'peasant order' — an order accustomed to political antagonism and which the political leadership was committed to preserving.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Conservative influence was weaker in this region, but also Gaitán's investigation of the massacre *de las bananeras* and his subsequent trip to Bogotá, after visiting the towns of the Magdalena River valley, had brought him a great deal of support and recognition as "defender of the working class" all along the Atlantic zone. See John Green's study of *Gaitanismo* along the Colombian Atlantic Coast, 'Vibrations of the Collective,' 283-298. Also Fals-Borda, *Historia Doble de la Costa*, vol. 2: (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia: Banco de la República: El Ancora Editores, 1981), 46B-56B.

⁸⁹ Camilo Torres, 'Violence and Socio-Cultural Change in Rural Colombia,' in *Father Camilo Torres. Revolutionary Writings*, ed., Maurice Zeitlin (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1972), 178. In his PhD dissertation (1957), Fals-Borda stated that the incipient process of industrialisation in Boyacá, a region dominated by traditional agrarian methods, was bringing about significant changes in its social bases, perhaps for the first time in the last four hundred years. Fals-Borda's historiographical analysis of the low productivity in Boyacá found as some of the main causes the survival of methods and tools inherited from the early colonial times. *El hombre y la tierra en Boyacá: Bases Sociológicas e Históricas para una Reforma Agraria* (Bogotá: Antares-Ediciones Documentos Colombianos, 1957), 217-235.

⁹⁰ Camilo Torres, 'Violence and Socio-Cultural Change in Rural Colombia,' 123; Fals-Borda, *Peasant Society*, 234-235.

Such a description also ignores the structural causes without which it is difficult to understand both the transformation in the system of values and its long-lasting consequences. This proves that there is a strong case to be made for looking once again at the significant contribution made by the seminal sociological analysis of Fals-Borda in his early works. Fals-Borda's approach remains crucial to considering *la Violencia* from an ethical standpoint because it described a destructive process and also a process of social readjustment and reorganisation.

This section is divided into three parts. The first approaches *la Violencia* as a process of social disintegration. Based on this, the second one analyses the political nature of the moral crisis underlying the phenomenon. The third part looks at the rather anomic process of re-integration during and after *la Violencia*.

3.1. *La Violencia* and the political dimension of moral disintegration

LVC's starting point, like most political historiography, is that the conflict began as an expression of political struggle within a democratic framework: that political hatreds exposed during *la Violencia* were deep-rooted within Colombia's bipartisan political system. Won by the Conservatives, the presidential elections of 1946 revived outbreaks of violence in the same areas where Liberals had attacked Conservative partisanship between 1930 and 1932 (after the Liberals put an end to fifty years of Conservative hegemony). These episodes named by Fals-Borda as 'teletic violence' or 'directed stage' for their pragmatic character (deployed either to secure local power or wreak bloody revenge), were rooted in the political disputes that nurtured the last civil war, the war of the Mil Dias,

1899–1902.⁹¹ The collapse of the *Gaitanista* movement conformed to Fals-Borda's 'teletic violence'. But this still fails to explain the rupture that *la Violencia* actually caused.⁹²

According to LVC, crimes committed against Liberals by political police had exacerbated the previous state of 'teletic violence' in rural areas 'which was later converted into *la Violencia*'.⁹³ The conflict was fomented in the newspapers which had created an overwhelming climate of conspiracy.⁹⁴ In February, Gaitán denounced in Congress the recruitment of hundreds of Conservative policemen for obstructing the Liberals' participation in elections.⁹⁵ This 'continued violence,' as Gaitán called it, gave occasion to the *March of Silence* on 7 February 1948. The day after Gaitán's death, in spite of ruthless opposition from both the Conservative extremist wing and radical *Gaitanistas*, a bipartisan coalition was set up; it governed until the Congress was closed by presidential decree in October 1949.⁹⁶

'Teletic violence' transformed into 'total conflict' — a conflict of annihilation — in 1948 when radicalised elements within the Conservative Party arrived at the Cabinet and unleashed a wave of mass violence with the aim of securing Conservative hegemony against a Liberal majority. Without the consolidation of the *laureanista* faction in the government and in the Conservative directorate it is difficult to understand the way events unfolded — a process of radicalisation and fanaticism which began in the mid-1930s.⁹⁷

⁹¹ Guzmán et al, LVC, 38-41. Topic also analysed in Malcolm Deas, 'Algunos interrogantes sobre la relación guerras civiles y violencia,' in *Pasado y presente de la violencia en Colombia*, 81-87.

⁹² Fals-Borda, 'The role of violence,' 26; 28.

⁹³ Fals-Borda, 'The Violence in Colombia.' ACH-UNC, FAFS, 1963, Box 1460, Folder 3_78.

⁹⁴ In January 1948, the journalist 'Caliban', brother of ex-president Santos, and one of the most authoritative voices of the Liberal press, pointed out that in searching for the causes of the political violence it was necessary to look at the press campaigns that stimulated it, reinforcing the image of the political adversaries as mortal enemies. *Revista Semana*, 24 January 1948.

⁹⁵ Molano, CHCV, 25.

⁹⁶ Gonzalo Sánchez, 'El Personaje, el evento, el legado,' 372.

⁹⁷ The rise and evolution of Laureano Gómez' faction, the *laureanistas*, is an aspect that this author has analysed in more depth in some papers and articles. See Closing chapter. The topic had been also analysed in several studies, the reason for which it is only mentioned briefly here. See Pecaut, *Orden y*

A series of massacres perpetrated by the notorious ‘Chulavitas,’ the Conservative police, was the beginning of what A. Molano named a *crusada neo-falangista*: a series of massacres perpetrated initially to homogenise entire regions politically.⁹⁸ ‘Blood and fire’ is what best described the action of the state — in the wake of formation of Liberal self-defence guerrillas, the decimation of the Liberal *gaitanistas*, labelled ‘Communists’, resulted in the indiscriminate annihilation of rural population. By 1953 the death toll surpassed 120,000.⁹⁹

An interesting criticism made by the Conservative elite about the book LVC was that the accounts and testimonies of victims, peasants and even guerrilla fighters were given prominence over the opinions of the political leaders, the high ranking military and the bishops. The interviewees’ low status, according to *El Siglo*, cast serious doubts on the veracity of the book (20 and 24 September 1962). At the risk of oversimplifying *la Violencia*, it can be said that from these testimonies collected by Guzmán, the darkest side of *la Violencia* was revealed — the ritualisation of torture and death, and the normalisation of unspeakably vicious criminality against even children, pregnant women and their foetuses. *La Violencia* consisted of ‘leaving nothing, not even the seed’.¹⁰⁰

violencia; Christopher Abel, *Política, Iglesia y Partidos*; Rubén Sierra ed., *La Restauración Conservadora 1946–1957* (2012); Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín, *El Oranguatan con Socaleva: cien años de democracia y represión en Colombia* (2014); James Henderson, *Modernization in Colombia* (2001).

⁹⁸ Also Molano, ‘Violence and Land Colonization,’ in *Violence in Colombia. The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*, ed. Charles Bergquist et al. (Wilmington, Delaware: SR Books, 1991), 195–216.

⁹⁹ The figures of the death toll during the first wave of *la Violencia*: 1948: 43,000; 1949: 18,500; 1950: 50,000; 1951: 10,300; 1952: 13,250; 1953: 8,600. Paul Oquist, *Violencia, conflicto y política en Colombia* (Bogotá: Banco Popular, 1976), 67–68.

¹⁰⁰ Guzmán et al., LVC, 247.

3.2. *La Violencia* and the moral question

A key element of Fals-Borda's analysis is this: technically distinct from the conflict of war, where violence is institutionalised as a positively sanctioned instrument of conflict, *la Violencia* dragged on and compelled an otherwise peaceful peasantry to fight or let themselves be killed. The result was a cycle of useless destruction, vengeance and boundless cruelty. This type of conflict that came to be called *la Violencia*, reached its climax in Colombia between 1949 and 1953, and again between 1955 and 1958.¹⁰¹

Unlike the early analysts of the moral crisis of the country (see Section 2), Fals-Borda did not primarily relate it to criminal behaviour. The 'moral crisis' refers to the excessive use of force and the great extent to which such criminal behaviour 'was justified or excused by the State, the political parties, or the ruling groups'.¹⁰² To the authors of LVC, the moral crisis was caused by the use and official justification of criminality of huge magnitude to secure a Conservative political hegemony; it was much more closely linked to the collapse of the legality and the legitimacy of the State than with individual or collective behavioural causes. The name of *la Violencia* in itself has served however to underplay the political ideology and strategies underlying such debacle and hence to continue the perception of a traditional bipartisan conflict.

After uncontested elections, Laureano Gómez took office in 1950. He exerted great effort to dissociate himself from his earlier sympathy for Nazi Germany and erstwhile admiration for the Falange Francoist. By taking part in the Korean War, Gómez only paid lip service to the U.S.: his real purpose, although ultimately in vain, was to eradicate Liberal resistance in order to establish a corporative and denominational

¹⁰¹ Fals-Borda, 'El conflicto, la violencia y la estructura social colombiana,' in LVC, 451.

¹⁰² Fals-Borda, 'The role of violence,' 26.

regime in Colombia like that implanted in Spain by Franco.¹⁰³ His anti-communism paid off since his government received technical and military support that was used indiscriminately against Liberals, *gaitanistas* and communist peasantry.¹⁰⁴ In the face of self-defence guerrilla groups, State repression was not only carried out by sadistic death squads but also through large-scale military operations for which up to 1,500 men were deployed at any one time.¹⁰⁵ Groups of prisoners were summarily executed.¹⁰⁶ When Fals-Borda visited Cunday in 1962, the memories of the genocides of 175 and 92 civilians perpetrated by the Conservative police, the *Chulavitas*, in 1953 were still fresh.¹⁰⁷ For Laureano Gómez instead, *la Violencia* was the result of communist plot consisting of goading police into overreacting so as to discredit the government.¹⁰⁸

The decisive blow to Laureano Gómez's regime however came neither from the Liberal leadership, who had left the country, nor from the ill-equipped Liberal-socialist guerrillas. In the midst of *la Violencia*, many members of the Conservative Party became aware of the partial collapse of the state: 'Factional rows within the Conservative Party, plus the inability of the Conservative government to stabilize the country either through repression or through some type of accord with the Liberals —

¹⁰³ Laureano Gómez's corporative state project was intellectually backed by the Jesuit Felix Restrepo, co-founder of the Javeriana University, who also published extensively about the convenience of corporativism in Colombia in *Revista Xaveriana*. In 1952, Gómez created a Constitutional Assembly to reform the constitution of 1886 so to lay the legal foundations of the new corporative state. The economic, industrial and agricultural *gremios* did not present initially resistance to the project since they were to have large participation in it so the church and the army too. The Liberal party refused to take part in the Assembly. Rojas Pinilla's coup in 1953, brought to an end the project. Henderson, *Modernization*, 352-356. Two relevant articles which analyse Gómez's corporative project in Colombia are: Helwar Figueroa Salamanca and Carlos Tuta Alarcón, 'El Estado corporativo colombiano: una propuesta de derechas, 1930-1953,' *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura*, no.32 (2005): 99-148; Tomás Barrero, 'Laureano Gómez y la democracia,' in *La Regeneración conservadora*, 105-128.

¹⁰⁴ See Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez, 'La profesionalización militar en Colombia: el período de la Violencia,' *Revista Análisis Político*, no.2 (1988): 7-29; Christopher Abel, *Política, Iglesia y Partidos*, 248-252.

¹⁰⁵ Either Conservative police, known as "Chulavitas" or the fearsome paramilitary gang *Los Pajaros*, who operated in the south west of the country under orders of the Conservative directorate (see closing chapter).

¹⁰⁶ Guzmán et al., LVC, 95-116; Molano, CHCV, 21; Elsa Marulanda and José González, *Historias de Frontera. Colonización y guerra en el Sumapaz* (Bogotá: CINEP, 1990), 16-17; 121-123.

¹⁰⁷ Fals-Borda, 'Cunday' (notebook, 1962). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Visiones_de_Colombia, Sub-folder Notas_Viaje_Cunday_4-5.

¹⁰⁸ Henderson, *Modernization*, 355.

harshly repressed and in practice banned from open participation in politics — ended in a military coup headed by [the Conservative] General Rojas Pinilla in 1953.’¹⁰⁹

After Rojas Pinilla’s coup, celebrated nation-wide, the first wave of *la Violencia* came to an end. On 19 June 1953, one week after Rojas Pinilla took office, a general amnesty was announced. Both guerrillas and counter-guerrilla groups responded immediately. By September more than 6,500 fighters across the country had handed over their arms. The most dramatic case was the *Llanos Orientales* where 3,540 Liberal men joined the amnesty and gave up arms in August alone.¹¹⁰

The second wave of *la Violencia*, led by Rojas Pinilla, began in 1954 against the guerrilla groups which had refused his amnesty. The selective killing of leaders who joined the first amnesty, as well as Rojas Pinilla’s irrefutable anti-communism, deterred guerrillas ideologically-infiltrated by the communist party from giving up their arms. From late 1954 the army, which had practically been neutral during the first wave, unleashed a counter-revolutionary war against the remaining guerrilla groups.¹¹¹ Concentrated in five regions, this period of *la Violencia* was more intense and brutal than before. Up to 3,000 military units on the ground were deployed against small villages and supported by bombers in the air. The establishment of concentration camps, attacks with ground-based and aircraft-borne heavy artillery as well as the use of napalm, caused a huge exodus of the peasantry and an unknown number of victims.¹¹² By eradicating communism, General Rojas Pinilla aimed to present himself as the bulwark of the Western System so gaining unrestricted support from the U.S. in order to

¹⁰⁹ Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín and Juan Carlos Guataquí, ‘The Colombian Case: Peace-Making and Power Sharing.’ Accessed 12 January 2006. web.worldbank.org/archive/website01241/.../COLOMBIA.PDF.

¹¹⁰ Guzmán et al., LVC, 117-118.

¹¹¹ Guzmán et al., LVC, 117-131.

¹¹² Guzmán et al., LVC, 121-125. Paul Oquist estimated the number of peasants displaced during the first and second wave of *la Violencia* at two millions. Oquist, *Violencia*, 78-80.

prolong his presidency. Rojas's announcement of a further period in office brought together previously sworn enemies into the establishment of the National Front, 1958–1974. Rojas was overthrown in May 1957 after a national civil strike.

The strategies of terror deployed from top down did not establish a strong State. On the contrary, during *la Violencia*, the State not only lost its monopoly over legal violence but also failed in establishing the legitimacy of its rule. The testimonies of the *Gaitanista* and Liberal guerrillas throughout the 1950s used expressions such as 'Guerra contra el Estado' and 'Revolución contra el gobierno' rather than *la Violencia*.¹¹³ The use of State force and the levels of brutality to deal equally with civilians and political guerrillas gave rise to the assertion that the State legitimized insurgency. After all, the compendium of atrocities and despicable crimes became the most conspicuous face of the moral crisis. However, according to LVC, the element underlying such a wave of indiscriminate aggression, homicide, robbery, arson and sexual crimes was the abolishment of core features of the rule of law — Congress suspended since 1949, strong censorship imposed, state of emergency extended, civilians organised in armed squads and summary executions, etc. The moral crisis was more a crisis of justice than a crisis of individual morality.¹¹⁴

3.3. The state of anomie and the basis of socio-political reintegration

To dwell only on the causation and horrors of *la Violencia* is to miss one of the most important aspects of this phenomenon — the transfer of power from the centre to the periphery in abnormal and anomic forms. Political violence, as Fals-Borda pointed out,

¹¹³ Gonzalo Sánchez, 'Violencia, guerrillas y estructuras agrarias,' in *Nueva Historia de Colombia*, vol. 2, ed. Álvaro Tirado Mejía (Bogotá: Planeta, 1989), 143-145.

¹¹⁴ LVC, 268-273.

demands cooperation; it cannot be possible without it. ‘La violencia representa la dialéctica entre conflicto y cooperación — como Cronos, devora a sus propios hijos.’¹¹⁵ In fact, by looking at the figures of *la Violencia* there is no room for doubt: estimates suggest that the number of guerrilla fighters — men, women and children — was between 40,000 and 55,000 by 1953; whereas the police, according to Ramsey, were no more than 25,000 men.¹¹⁶

Although it was too early for Fals-Borda to determine the extent to which *la Violencia* had modified collective values, the book LVC documented a significant shift in the integration of various levels of power; a state that Fals-Borda defined as ‘anomical’ rather than anarchic.¹¹⁷ *La Violencia*, in spite of its immense chaos, gave rise to a complex web of integration of power both from top down and from bottom up.

Top-down control was exerted by the network of regional *gamonales* — large landowners operating as local political leaders — who were coordinated nationwide by the Ministry of Internal Affairs or the Conservative National Directorate.¹¹⁸ The almighty power of *gamonales* partially explains the *Clientelist* system that characterised Colombian politics until the late twentieth century.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, high prices for coffee — a boom skilfully administrated by the powerful Coffee Federation whilst the

¹¹⁵ Fals-Borda. Interviewed by Fernando Cubides, *Camilo Torres: testimonios sobre su figura y su época* (Medellín: La Carreta, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2011), 89-106.

¹¹⁶ Molano, CHCV, 26; Moncayo, CHCV, 47; Russell Ramsey, *Guerrilleros y soldados*, 206.

¹¹⁷ ‘Anomical stage’ defines a dialectical process according to which the collapse of a system of values does not occur without a corresponding series of values in predicament or transition. Fals-Borda, ‘The role of violence,’ 29; Camilo Torres, ‘Violence and Socio-Cultural Change in Rural Colombia,’ 152.

¹¹⁸ AGN Ministerio de Gobierno Folder 0009, Comunicado en clave de Ministro de Interior José María Andrade ordenando el reclutamiento de policías en áreas conservadoras. This document survived the destruction of official documents, maybe because it was encoded. See footnote 9. José María Villareal, Conservative governor of Boyacá and a key element in the creation and coordination of chulavita police. Interviewed by Arturo Alape, *La paz, la Violencia: testigo de excepción* (Bogotá: Planeta, 1985), 46. See also Fernán E. González, *Poder y violencia en Colombia* (Bogotá: CINEP, 2014), 285-287.

¹¹⁹ Gamonales were either candidates or cast a decisive vote in the election of mayors, judges and other civil, military and ecclesiastic authorities at the county level. Camilo Torres, ‘Violence and Socio-Cultural Change,’ 141-143.

production was managed by complex networks of legal and illegal intermediaries and administrators — explain also why *la Violencia* coincided with a time of economic prosperity.¹²⁰ Moreover, the empowerment of economic and industrial groups and the neutralisation of urban trade unions resulted in the former becoming the only sector able to put pressure on the State.¹²¹ In 1951, the Minister of Labour introduced his annual report announcing that social peace has been established.¹²²

Bottom-up organisation came from the *juntas revolucionarias* or the organisation of passive and active groups of self-defence. Neighbourhoods that had traditionally been isolated from each other became forcibly integrated by the guerrilla warfare.¹²³

Although guerrilla groups were initially fostered or approved by the leaders of the Liberal Party, they were abandoned by the party leadership, leaving the peasants' struggle in their own hands. Without national direction, the confrontation was led militarily and ideologically by local or improvised leaders. As Eduardo Franco Isaza, one of the guerrilla leaders, stated that the biggest mistake of the peasantry was to attempt a social revolution on behalf of the Liberal Party, which was under an anti-popular and anti-revolutionary leadership.

One would think that the eminent public men of Liberalism who ... bound the people in that struggle, would be spiritually and personally prepared to face the consequences of their acts. Nevertheless, this was not so. On the contrary, when the officially-planned violence burst forth against the towns, and the people of the countryside were faced with the alternative of perishing or resisting, they chose to resist. At that point the Liberal leaders, who only yesterday had been so brave, so dissatisfied and demanding, either

¹²⁰ Marco Palacios, *El Café en Colombia, 1850–1970: Una historia económica, social y política* (Bogotá: Planeta, 2002), 447–467; Carlos Miguel Ortiz Sarmiento, 'The "Business of the Violence": The Quindío in the 1950s and 1960s,' in *Violence in Colombia. The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*, 125–153.

¹²¹ Such as the National Association of Industrialists (ANDI), the Popular Colombian Association of Industrialists (ACOPI) and the National Merchants Federation (FENALCO). For the relation between the State and the *gremios* during Conservative administrations of Ospina and Gómez see Abel, *Política, Iglesia y Partidos*, 276–287; Pecaut, *Orden y violencia*, 511–534; Mauricio Archila, et al., *Una historia inconclusa: Izquierdas políticas y sociales en Colombia* (Bogotá: Colciencias, CINEP, 2009), 57–64.

¹²² 'La paz social reina.' Quoted in Pecaut, *Orden y violencia*, 518.

¹²³ Camilo Torres, 'Violence and Socio-Cultural Change,' 130.

isolated themselves in their homes and private occupations, or suddenly chose circumspection, moderation, good manners, friendly rapprochements, and respectable petitions.¹²⁴

Indeed, one of the most interesting attempts of grassroots organisation amidst the conflict were the guerrilla codes or *Leyes del Llano*. Written by the lawyer José Alvear Restrepo and approved by the Comando Guerrillero de los Llanos, these codes revealed a significant effort to establish an insurgent society with a legal framework based on popular legitimacy — their ideology was *Gaitinaista*.¹²⁵

The formerly passive and obedient peasantry suffered through their tenacious resistance or undertook a mass exodus, protected only by improvised fighters. A number of communities, symbolically and pragmatically divorced from the State, were established. As documented in LVC, informal armies, integrated with local men, women and children, not only became channels of social mobility but also disputed the State control of neighbourhoods or even entire regions. Whole villages disappeared and an unquantifiable number of peasants migrated to towns and cities in search of refuge. This resulted in an accelerated process of urbanisation.¹²⁶

In a similar way, the peasantry's disaffection with the church was 'probably not solely produced by those elements of the clergy who in some way encourage the killing of peasants.'¹²⁷ It also resulted from the church's lack of sincere solidarity or will to defend people's interests. The loss of traditional patterns of leadership, behaviour, and

¹²⁴ Juan Lozano y Lozano, Prologue to *Las guerrillas del Llano*, by Eduardo Franco Isaza (Bogotá, 1959) 10. Fragment translated into English in Fals-Borda, 'The Violence in Colombia.' ACH-UNC, FAFS, 1963, Box 1460, Folder 3_82.

¹²⁵ These codes contain all sort of regulation of daily life, norms of conduct for fighters and non-fighters, and rules for the establishment and regulation of communities under the criteria of justice and equality. See Primera Ley del Llano, 11 September 1952; Segunda Ley del Llano, 13 July 1953; Ley del Sur del Tolima, 21 August 1957. Published in full in the second volume of LVC (1963), 71-185.

¹²⁶ Camilo Torres, 'Urbanisation and Urban Reform,' in *Father Camilo Torres. Revolutionary Writings*, ed., Maurice Zeitlin (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1972), 105-115; Guzmán, et al, LVC., 163-164.

¹²⁷ Camilo Torres, 'Violence and Socio-Cultural Change,' 167.

solidarity explains why the executive committees of the political parties, and particularly the local bosses, tried by any means to make alliances with the new leaders. Such attempts to work together paved the way for the continuation of civil armed groups, bandits and some guerrilla groups in the aftermath of *la Violencia*.¹²⁸

The sheer complexity and the regional differences made it impossible for Fals-Borda to be precise about the scale of the axiological changes which Colombian rural society went through in the aftermath of *la Violencia*. A significant bibliography has been built on the basis laid down by LVC.¹²⁹ In 1985, when LVC was, except for Oquist's study (1978), the only reference and the study of the regional and local impacts of *la Violencia* was in its incipient stage, Gonzalo Sánchez observed two problems that were both political and methodological: 'the connection between regional variation and national unity (or, to put it more exactly, paraphrasing Marco Palacios, the need to pose the "regional as a national problem"); and the search for an adequate way of formulating an inseparable link between the real fragmentation of what is being studied—*la Violencia*, in all its multiple expressions—and the permanent challenge of synthesis. We must recognize multiplicity and unity as integral parts of a single process.'¹³⁰ However, as later research on local areas suggested, a national narrative about *la Violencia*, based

¹²⁸ Camilo Torres, 'Violence and Socio-Cultural Change,' 151.

¹²⁹ Carried out especially in the late 1980s and 1990s, this research, focused on regions affected by the violence of the 1950s, was conducted by postgraduate researchers most of them sociologists (see footnote 4). In the early 1990s, Colombia was at the top of the list of the most dangerous countries: with approximately 25,000 homicides per year in the early 90s, Colombia had exceeded almost four times the rate of violence in Brazil, the second highest globally. Eduardo Posada Carbo, 'La impunidad y el crimen: hacia un consenso sobre los orígenes de la violencia en Colombia,' *Estrategia Económica y Financiera*, December (1995): 33. Consequently, research emphasized the need of using quantitative, macroeconomic and mathematical methods to analyse crime, violence and the impact of production and commercialisation of illegal drugs on urban areas as well as the crisis of legality. In this vein, Alvaro Camacho Guizado and Álvaro Guzmán Barney, *Colombia, ciudad y violencia* (1990); Francisco E. Thoumi, *The Size of the Illegal Drugs Industry in Colombia* (1993); Malcolm Deas, Fernando Gaitán Daza, *Dos ensayos especulativos sobre la violencia en Colombia* (1995); Mauricio Rubio, *Crimen e impunidad: precisiones sobre la violencia* (1999); Alvaro Camacho, *Nuevas visiones sobre la violencia en Colombia* (1997).

¹³⁰ Gonzalo Sánchez, 'La Violencia en Colombia: New Research, New Questions,' *Hispanic American Historical Review* 65, no.4 (1985): 804.

on its socio-economic impact, has proved hitherto unattainable. *La Violencia* — or rather a series of regional and local *violencias* — had effects significantly different from one region to another or even between closed neighbourhoods. In 1987, D. Pecaú's insightful analysis of *la Violencia* showed the boundaries of any attempt of synthesis or global interpretation; however, he underlined the relevance of a few constitutive elements.¹³¹ The closing chapter will underline to what extent Fals-Borda's analysis of *la Violencia* had already laid the foundations for approaching one of those constitutive elements: the dialectic between legality and legitimacy — which is at the crossroads of what Sánchez called 'the challenge of synthesis'.¹³²

In search of the 'better'

As indicated in the introduction, a number of the CHCV's contributions made a clear-cut division between *la Violencia* and the revolutionary armed conflict from 1964 onwards. Fals-Borda did not ignore the differences between the two phenomena; however, for him there was a link. This link was more significant than the evolution of the guerrilla groups from self-defence into revolutionary action groups: the same status quo they were fighting against. Unlike revolutions or counter-revolutions which bring breaks and significant political changes, *la Violencia* represents continuity — after a decade of merciless fighting the same elite was re-established and people's hatreds were still very much alive.

For the purpose of this chapter, it is relevant to emphasise that Fals-Borda was not an analyst of the political violence but a rural sociologist who became increasingly interested in the phenomenon of *la Violencia* because it had shaken the rural world to its

¹³¹ *Orden y violencia*, 507-509.

¹³² Gonzalo Sánchez, 'La Violencia en Colombia: New Research, New Questions,' 804.

foundations. Fals-Borda's knowledge of rural areas provided him with enough evidence to predict that: 'If we leave [the social conflict] in this unleashed form, without applying basic solutions, Colombia might continue to be victim of violence for at least twenty more years. Can any social system support such strains?'¹³³ With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that Fals-Borda's alarming tone considerably underestimated the far-reaching consequences of *la Violencia*.

After what E. Hobsbawm described as 'the greatest mobilisation of armed peasants (whether guerrillas, bandits or self-defence groups) in the contemporary history of the Western Hemisphere,' the question posed to the National Front was how to prevent violence from becoming the main means to political participation in future.¹³⁴ Mainly because of U.S. developmental policy, the National Front fostered a series of reforms from above, as will be seen in chapters 5 and 6. However, the power-sharing agreement was trapped in its own contradictions: on the one hand, it was meant to be a peaceful transition to democracy and modernisation; on the other hand, it represented the vested interests of backward oligarchies, which stymied much-needed but radical reforms. Thus, the link suggested by Fals-Borda between *la Violencia* and the later political violence was the attempts by the traditional ruling class to preserve the continuity of a social order which had fallen under the blows of *la Violencia*. As Fals-Borda stated in 1962: 'It can be also demonstrated that the true social revolution failed in Colombia as a result of having passed to the full stage of uncontrolled conflict.'¹³⁵ This failure, Hobsbawm asserts, 'had made violence [in Colombia] the constant, universal, omnipresent core of public life.'¹³⁶

¹³³ Fals-Borda, 'The role of violence,' 30.

¹³⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times, A Twentieth-Century Life* (London: Abacus, 2003), 375.

¹³⁵ Fals-Borda, 'The role of violence' 26.

¹³⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, 373.

Although Fals-Borda overestimated the revolutionary potential of *Gaitanista* movement, his observation of a radical and extreme process of disintegration and re-organisation that Colombia experienced in such short a period of time was realistic. It led him to conclude that the country would require unprecedented efforts and perseverance in order to produce something ‘better.’ ‘Something *better*,’ he said, ‘refers to the configuration of a new social structure based on the actual application of recognized ideals such as justice, respect for life, and encouragement of the creative impulse.’¹³⁷ To this end, meaning to transform these values into a political platform, Fals-Borda committed himself as scholar, believer and political activist, as will be seen in chapters 4 to 6.

Before analysing Fals-Borda’s involvement in the realm of politics, one important question remains to be answered. As discussed in the introduction, with the exception of Vega’s contribution, the CHCV’s report does not bring up new evidence or reveal new facts in relation to *la Violencia* — which suggests, as this chapter argues, LVC remains crucial to understanding *la Violencia*. Thus, the question can be posed as follows: if LVC, the first systematic research on this phenomenon, provided an ample base on which to build up a nationwide narrative, how can one explain its failure in providing the basis for a collective memory about it? This is the question the next chapter aims to address.

¹³⁷ Fals-Borda, ‘The role of violence,’ 30.

Chapter Three

The Criticism of *La Violencia en Colombia*:

Materials for a Pioneering Essay on Sociology of Knowledge

In 2005, upon the publication of new editions of the two volumes of *La Violencia en Colombia* (LVC), the now 80-year-old Fals-Borda recalled the campaign to discredit and the attacks against the authors of the book when it was published in 1962.¹ As he recalled it, the co-authors' well-intentioned contribution to peace in Colombia, was met with a ferocious reaction:

La publicación [de LVC] constituyó una de nuestras más grandes frustraciones. Esperamos demasiado de lo que sería el libro a los ojos del país. Todo lo contrario. A los autores se nos insultó en forma soez durante meses continuos en el Senado de la República. Algunos nos amenazaron de muerte y otros hicieron todo lo que estaba en sus manos para desacreditar, sepultar y acallar la edición.²

However, persuading the political, military and ecclesiastical leaderships to rise to the challenge that *la Violencia* had posed to the entire Colombian society was only one purpose of the book. When it was written, LVC had had at least one more aim. As Fals-Borda asserted in 1962: '[LVC] has been written with the aim to serve the country and develop science.'³ Thus, the project had had an academic purpose too — to establish the foundations of a scientific sociology in the new Faculty of Sociology of the National University, devoted entirely to the study of problems within their social contexts.

Indeed, the foundation of the Faculty of Sociology in 1959 had to contend with criticism

¹ LVC only refers to the first volume (1962). The second volume will be followed by the year of publication: LVC (1963).

² Fals-Borda, prologue to *La Violencia en Colombia* vol. 2, by Germán Guzmán, Fals-Borda and Eduardo Umaña. 1963. Reprint (Bogotá: Editora Aguilar, 2005), 20.

³ Archivo Central e Histórico Universidad Nacional, Fondo Acumulado Facultad de Sociología (ACH-UN, FAFS) 1962–1965, Box 1460, folder 03_45.

of those ‘skeptics who, unaware of or forgetting the progress sociology has made in the last thirty years, see sociology as a practically useless discipline’.⁴

By no means was LVC the first research carried out by the faculty: in fact, it was the seventeenth monograph published by the Faculty of Sociology in its first three years of existence.⁵ But it was the first study of such magnitude, and above all, one which analysed the largest social debacle of Colombia — a debacle which had been triggered by the actions and omissions of a ruling class once again back in power. The study of *la Violencia* came after Fals-Borda’s resignation as vice-minister of Agriculture to devote his efforts to the consolidation of the Faculty of Sociology. This academic study inevitably had political implications as its authors had held public, political or ecclesiastic responsibilities.⁶ In the introduction (1962), Fals-Borda stated: ‘We have always remained extremely aware of our responsibility, but we have also presented our evidence without apprehension or temerity ... Colombia has reached a crossroads in its historical development, where the truth must be told, even if it is painful, and even though it produces serious difficulties for those who dare to tell it.’⁷

Criticism was expected by LVC’s authors, who anticipated that these reactions would be very useful for further reflection on the social conflict. This was the case of the first criticism, which welcomed LVC’s call for constructive understanding of the conflict.⁸ However, it was followed by a wave of acrimonious criticism, mixed with personal attacks on the authors, two months after the book was published. Thus, the project, of

⁴ ACH-UN, FAFS, 1962–1965, Box 1460, folder 03_47.

⁵ Fals-Borda, prologue, LVC, 20.

⁶ The other two authors were Eduardo Umaña, Director of the technical office of the Ministry of Justice, and Guzmán, a Monsignor of the Catholic Church.

⁷ ACH-UN, FAFS, 1962, Box 1460, folder 03_50–51.

⁸ ‘For great evils, strong remedies are necessary! We hope that the effort will not have been in vain, that it will be well understood and appreciated, and that its effects for the good of the country will not be long delayed.’ Fals-Borda, ‘The Violence in Colombia.’ ACH-UN, FAFS, 1962–1965, Box 1460, folder 3_54.

which this volume was to have been the first of a series on the subject, appeared to have come to its end. Interestingly enough, as J. M. Rojas has pointed out, one of the most consistent aspects of Fals-Borda's intellectual career was to respond to criticism of his works with further research.⁹

Although largely overlooked by subsequent literature on *la Violencia*, Fals-Borda's analysis of the ruthless debate sparked by the publication of the first LVC volume (1962), is an exceptional document for analysing both the historic value of LVC itself and the ideological debate in the aftermath of *la Violencia*. Published as the introduction of the second and last volume of LVC (1963), it was perhaps the first critical exercise in sociology of knowledge in Colombia — an aspect of Fals-Borda's intellectual work which has also been ignored hitherto.

In order to analyse Fals-Borda's systematic approach to the debate about LVC, this chapter reviews the criticism published in the press and magazines between July and December 1962; at Fals-Borda's correspondence written during the same period; and at the draft of Fals-Borda's introduction to LVC (1963), entitled 'La reacción al libro sobre la Violencia,' which significantly differs from the text finally published in 1963.¹⁰ Both his correspondence and his draft with many handwritten comments are, therefore, as important as the final text in understanding what Fals-Borda himself called '[his] first expression of abandonment of the functionalist model'.¹¹

⁹ José María Rojas Guerra, prologue to *Antología*, by Orlando Fals-Borda (Bogotá: Vicerrectoría Académica Universidad Nacional Editorial, 2010), xi.

¹⁰ ACH-UN, FAFS, 1962–1964, Box 1413, folders 3 and 4. 'La reacción al libro sobre la Violencia,' in ACH-UN, FAFS, 1962–1965, Box 1460, folder 03, documents_1–44.

¹¹ Lola Cendales, et al., 'One sows the seed, but it has its own dynamics: an interview with Orlando Fals Borda,' *International Journal of Action Research*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2015): 24. Fals-Borda referred to Chapter 13 of LVC: 'El Conflicto, la violencia y la estructura social colobiana.' (See Chapter 2, section 3).

As indicated in Chapter 1, reviews about Fals-Borda have tended to treat the period when he was Dean of the faculty of Sociology as an intellectually homogenous period — as if positive functionalism had been a consistent influence between 1955 and his book on subversion (1967).¹² Based on the analysis of sources usually neglected, this chapter argues that LVC marked the beginning of a more radical criticism of the establishment, which paved the way for his stances on subversion (see Chapter 5).

This chapter is divided into four parts. First it provides the political and ideological context within which the debate about LVC took place. Second, using Fals-Borda's personal correspondence, it examines the impact of the debate, and hence the historical value of LVC as the first national narrative of *la Violencia*. Third, using Fals-Borda's pioneering essay on the sociology of knowledge, it analyses the ideological debate about LVC. This helps to understand some of the factors that silenced a collective memory about *la Violencia*. The fourth part introduces the ideological conflict between supporters of the status quo and those who aspired to a new socio-political order during the mid-1960s. Finally, the chapter closes with a short reflection on the origins of Fals-Borda's shift towards a critique of ideology of political violence in Colombia.

1. The National Front and the aftermath of *la Violencia*

In October 1948, the Conservative leader Laureano Gómez predicted, in apocalyptic tones, the dissolution of the Liberal Party. In his article entitled 'The end of a stage', he argued that the Liberal Party, which had sacrificed the principles of equality and order on behalf of its claims to absolute freedom, also lost its *raison d'être* when it decided to

¹² See Chapter 1, introduction, footnotes 4–7.

serve the beast, namely, the Communist Party.¹³ Gómez argued that the Liberal Party's apostasy was the sign of its dissolution. 'In Colombia,' Gómez claimed, 'the new political alignment is Communism on the one hand and Christianity on the other. The Liberal ideology will die, because the majority of its followers abandoned its doctrine.' (*El Siglo*, 17 October 1948).¹⁴

This article, originally published in the Spanish magazine *Criterio* (October 1948) during Gómez's short self-exile in Spain, 1948–1949, is highly interesting for two reasons.¹⁵ First, because it reveals two of the most consistent mechanisms through which the radical wing of the Conservative Party made up for its lack of political ideology throughout 1930s and 1940s: the mystification of the past and the creation of enmity, since it needed enemies for its legitimacy.¹⁶ Having an imagined but powerful enemy (Bolsheviks, Mexican Revolutionaries, Mao's legions, etc.), made the Conservative and ecclesiastical leadership believe in themselves as a more moral people than the Liberals. The word 'Communism' served as an ideological shorthand for all the groups who in any way opposed the Conservatives' attempts to restore their hegemony.¹⁷

¹³ Conservatives' cry that the Liberal Party had surrendered to Stalin's dominion was consistent from 1936 to the establishment of the National Front, 1958, when Laureano Gómez dissociated the Liberal Party from Communism. Guzmán et al., LVC, 425.

¹⁴ Laureano Gómez, under the pseudonym of Cornelio Nepote.

¹⁵ *Gaitanistas* held Gómez responsible for the assassination of the Liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán (see Chapter 2, section 1). Gómez's house and the building of his newspaper, *El Siglo*, were among the first buildings to be burnt down during the *bogotazo*. After this, Gómez sought asylum in Franco's Spain. In 1953, after General Rojas Pinilla's coup, Gómez resided again in Spain until 1958 when he returned to establish the National Front. See James Henderson, *Modernization in Colombia. The Laureano Gómez Years, 1889–1965* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 362; 376–379.

¹⁶ 'Tras cuarenta y cinco años de paz ... Cuando los colombianos se gloriaban de la cultura política, que creían conquistada en largos años de experiencia y patriótico celo, irrumpió la barbarie del nueve de abril [1948]. Los horrendos sucesos [del Bogotazo] se produjeron bajo la dirección de unos cuantos dirigentes comunistas extranjeros y nacionales ... realizados siempre a nombre y con las banderas del partido liberal y por las manos de sus gentes' (Laureano Gómez, *El Siglo*, 17 October 1948).

¹⁷ 'When they erased the name of God from the preamble to the Constitution, when they adulterated the wise principles which reigned over the concordance of the spiritual and civil power, when the youth in the university and secondary schools was submitted to unmasked instruction in naturalism and atheism, there emerged a process of disfiguration of our national soul and destruction of our noble Christian and free country, giving us instead a structure which forced the people to pass over red paths of revolution'. (Laureano Gómez, *El Siglo*, 8 August 1950).

Second, because what eventually transpired was the reverse of Gómez's predictions.

Ten years later, when the Liberal and Conservative leadership reached an agreement to establish the National Front, 1958, it was Laureano Gómez and the doctrinaire Conservatives who abjured their principles and hence, the traditional nuances of the Conservative doctrine vanished after the bi-partisan coalition embraced President Kennedy's reformist programme Alliance for Progress, as will be seen in section 4.¹⁸ Thus, in the 1960s, the new ideological alignment was: neo-liberalism versus a wide spectrum of antagonists, ranging from reformist dissident groups to revolutionary guerrillas.

In the throes of *la Violencia*, crowds were relentlessly harangued and incited to violence under the threat of an inevitable civil war. In 1957, after Rojas Pinilla's announcement of his intention to stay in office for another period, a cautious plan to remove him was set in motion.¹⁹ The rhetoric of the National Front's supporters revolved around the need for the traditional parties to return to power to 'save the country' — as the national press put it with the support of the industrial sector throughout November 1957.²⁰ After ten years of political turmoil, on 1 December 1957, the national referendum welcomed the National Front, which in accordance with previous negotiations would have a Conservative in power for the first presidential period, 1958–1962.

Unsurprisingly, opposition to the creation of the National Front had come from the Conservatives. The leader José María Nieto created the Movimiento Católico de Resistencia, which revived the long-held religious view against political secularisation.

¹⁸ For Gómez's project of a corporative state see chapter 2, footnote 121.

¹⁹ After two accords (at Sitges and Benidorm, Spain, 1956 and 1957, respectively) signed by the Liberal Alberto Lleras and the Conservative Laureano Gómez, exiled in Spain after he was overthrown by Rojas himself, a national strike was arranged which forced Rojas' peaceful capitulation in May 1957. A transitional military junta governed between 1957 and 1958.

²⁰ This time the propaganda inviting to vote for the referendum addressed to the women, to whom Rojas Pinilla had granted the right to vote: 'Si deseas libertad a tus hijos de los odios partidistas, dilo en el próximo plebiscito' (*La República*, 16 November; *Acción Nueva*, 17 November 1957).

For Nieto even holding a referendum would be a victory of Communism, Protestantism, the Masons and the Liberals all conniving together against the Catholic Church.²¹ Nieto was simply repeating the condemnations that Bishop Miguel Angel Builes had written in his pastoral letters and published in the Conservative press since 1936.²²

The person who pointed out the essential anti-democratic character of the National Front was Alzate Avendaño, one of the co-founders of Los Leopardos.²³ Alzate Avendaño, former pro-fascist and the spearhead of an ephemeral modern Christian democratic movement, recognised the two main political dangers of such a monopoly: first, that any new popular movement in future could enter into the political arena only as a revolutionary movement; and second, that the nature of the National Front would mean the ideological capitulation of the historical political parties. As he put it: 'Un

²¹ Cesar Augusto Ayala, 'Reconquista Conservadora. Colombia 1957–1958,' *Historia Crítica*, n. 11, (1995): 21. In this article, Ayala analyses the intense partisan press campaign launched from November 1957 onwards with the aim to convince both liberals and conservatives to vote for a referendum in order to establish a bipartisan coalition.

²² In 1936, the Liberals' attempt to reform the Conservative Constitution of 1886. Their intention to remove the name of God from the Constitution foreword, triggered a nationwide Conservative reaction. Builes's condemnation of the Liberal Party and claims of religious persecution became stereotypical since: 'Hoy nos hallamos en plena persecución legal contra la religión, persecución que es mil veces peor que la persecución sangrienta ... El Liberalismo ha cedido el campo en todos los órdenes al Comunismo bolchevique, contra éste vamos a luchar con todas nuestras armas. No hay en la actualidad sino dos campos en el mundo: Roma y Moscú; el Vicario de Cristo y el vicerregente de Satanás; Pio XI y Stalin; la verdad y el error; el bien y la subversión total.' Quoted in Miguel Zapata Restrepo, *La mitra azul*, 262.

²³ Los Leopardos, a group of young radical conservatives, founded in 1934, with the aim to combat the rise of socialism and communism as the means to prevent class struggle. Their manifestos and ideology were published in Silvio Villegas, *No hay enemigos a la Derecha* (1937). Together with electoral abstention their activity evolved to mobilising the masses and creating combat brigades to repel the Communist Popular Front. The guiding idea was that 'faith alone has the power to mobilize the masses' Villegas, *No hay enemigos*, 232. This gradually succeeded in radicalising moderate factions. This shift in the *civilista* wing towards the extreme right of the party was ratified in the Convention of 1937 when the party called itself Partido de Conservatismo Derechista (Revista Javeriana, vol. XII, 1937: 148). As Catholicism was an area where both moderate and radical conservatives could comfortably converge, the Church's doctrine became the cornerstone of conservative agenda. The conservative leader Gonzalo Restrepo summarised the party ideological itinerary. He stated: El programa conservador se entreteje al evangelio social y económico de la Iglesia propugna. Ni democracia liberal ni colectivismo económico: catolicismo total es la síntesis conservadora de nuestro tiempo'. (*El Colombiano*, 15 June 1935). For a comprehensive analysis of Alzate Avendaño: Cesar Augusto Ayala, *Inventando al Mariscal: Gilberto Alzate Avendaño, circularidad ideológica y mimesis política* (2010)

fraude mental, una capitulación doctrinaria... que iría en perjuicio de las colectividades históricas, convirtiéndolas en heterogéneas clientelas sin unidad de ideologías y objetivos.’²⁴

Similarly, the National Front posed two main challenges to Alzate Avendaño’s own political aspirations as leader of a doctrinaire conservatism. Such a coalition would mean losing Catholicism as a political force, which according to him would deepen the country-wide moral crisis that had originated in the abandonment of Catholic values. Second, it would mean surrendering to the principles of neo-liberal capitalism. By underplaying the Conservative nature of his Movimiento de Unión y Reconquista (MUR), Alzate Avendaño emphasised its class and political-religious character so, ironically, it grew to resemble Jorge Eliécer Gaitán’s socialist populism. However, as Ayala points out, after a decade of extreme violence, Alzate Avendaño’s belligerent discourse on ‘re-conquest of the political hegemony’ was out of tune with the Coalition’s promises of peace and reconciliation.²⁵

By the time of the parliamentary elections in March 1958, the division among the Conservative factions was not ameliorated. On the contrary, it had seriously deepened. After the party’s inability to reach agreement over the candidate for the presidential elections, the leader of the party, Laureano Gómez, delivered power for the first period of the National Front to the monolithic Liberal Party.²⁶ On 4 May 1958 Jorge Leyva, the candidate of Alzate Avendaño’s dissident MUR, obtained 614,861 votes against 2,482,948 for the Liberal Alberto Lleras, candidate of the bipartisan coalition. This first administration of the National Front focused on large-scale social reforms and

²⁴ Gilberto Alzate Avendaño, ‘Lo popular en la política. Conferencia radial, noviembre 15 de 1957,’ in Gilberto Alzate Avendaño, *Obras Selectas* (Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 1979), 153.

²⁵ Ayala, ‘Reconquista,’ 24.

²⁶ The Liberal Party united around Alberto Lleras obtained 2,132,741 votes against 1,556,273 for the Conservative Party, divided in three factions: Laureano Gómez’s (952,364), Valencia’s (317,627) and Alzate Avendaño’s (285,217). Ayala, *Reconquista*, 27.

development, conceived also, perhaps even mainly, in terms of an anti-violence device: 'It meant prosperity and services, but also less inequality, so workers and peasants would have fewer incentives to indulge in violence and/or be disloyal to the system.'²⁷

Colombia's economic growth in relation to its neighbours' growth during this period allowed Sanín Gutiérrez and Guataquí to affirm that the National Front was a 'tolerably good performer'.²⁸ In terms of military achievements, they also concluded that 'as a pacification project the National Front was anything but a failure.'²⁹ However, the state's military-based approach to deal with the aftermath of *la Violencia* increased in inverse proportion to people's participation in elections. For the second National Front presidency, Valencia's, 1962–1966, slightly more than a third of those eligible voted and for the mid-term elections on 15 March 1964 abstention from voting reached 70%.³⁰ This figure reflected an increasing sense of popular frustration which was expressed by people turning away from politics.

Moreover, chronic factional antagonism within the Conservative Party along with the appointment of Guillermo Valencia as candidate for the presidential election of 1962 had accentuated the National Front's lack of popularity. As described by Henderson, Valencia was an ineffectual president: 'He had little understanding of or interest in economics—this at a time when the country was sliding into a serious recession. Most of his time seemed to be spent in divvying up political posts under terms of National

²⁷ Francisco Gutiérrez and Juan Carlos Guataquí, 'The Colombian Case: Peace-Making and Power Sharing: The National Front (1958–1974) and New Constitution (1991–2002) experiences.' Accessed 2 December 2015. <http://web.worldbank.org/archive/website01241/WEB/IMAGES/COLOMBIA.PDF>

²⁸ Deeper analysis on the National Front in relation to development policy and agricultural reform will be carried out in Chapter 6.

²⁹ Gutiérrez Sanín and Guataquí, 'The Colombian Case.' Accessed 2 December 2015.

³⁰ See Robert H. Dix, *Colombia: the Political Dimension of Change* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 162; Guzmán et al, LVC (1963), 435.

Front power-sharing canons, hosting drunken state banquets, and enjoying duck-hunting trips on his Cauca estate.’³¹

Valencia, an enthusiastic supporter of fascism and Spanish Falange in his youth, responded to social unrest with military aggression.³² In 1964, compelled by the son of Laureano Gómez, Alvaro Gómez, Valencia gave the order to bomb the so-called ‘independent republics’ — a measure seeking to stamp out self-defence guerrillas by using the same military repression that had proved effective against rural banditry — both by-products of *la Violencia* (see section 4). Valencia’s unpopularity significantly increased after the use of napalm and the intervention of the U.S. military force in the extermination of the ‘independent republics’. The threat of a workers’ general strike in early 1965 and fierce student demonstrations on a national scale against his administration, led Valencia to decree a state of siege.³³

In spite of promises of agrarian reform and social welfare programmes, Valencia’s administration did little to improve the ‘extremely low standards of living’ of almost half of the Colombian population’.³⁴ A dramatic fall in coffee prices and increased inflation and unemployment in the early 1960s compounded the existing economic stagnation. Additionally, the Colombian state played a relatively small role in the economy whilst ‘most Latin American nations were committed to statist economic

³¹ Henderson, *Modernization*, 407.

³² Valencia alongside Los Leopardos in the late 1930s focused on the media, creating newspapers or working for the local ones such as *La Patria* of Manizales, *Jerarquía* in Medellín and *Claridad* in Popayan, the latter founded by Valencia (see footnote 24).

³³ The fact that most growth took place in the public sector meant that unions gained a considerable relevance in public affairs. Organised labour ‘doubled its proportion of the workforce between 1958 and 1965, from 5.5 per cent of the total to 13.4 per cent’. Henderson, *Modernization*, 406. However, in the light of a general strike in early 1965, after a string of local strikes, and with the intervention of employer associations, a labour law reform appeased the unions.

³⁴ Albert Berry and Miguel Urrutia, *Income Distribution in Colombia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 40.

policies featuring make-work programs and extensive government investment in the public sector'.³⁵

In December 1963, when the second volume of LVC was published, it was clear to its authors that the main problem in the aftermath of *la Violencia* was neither banditry nor the remaining guerrilla enclaves but was a series of inner contradictions in a political system ruled by a bipartisan oligarchy. Such contradictions included, for instance, reformism without social change, an agrarian reform which favoured the well-off, political exclusion and marginalisation of popular sectors, and not least, the conviction, ingrained in influential political leadership, that violence was the most effective means to deal with violence.³⁶

2. The impact of the book *La Violencia en Colombia*

As mentioned above, Fals-Borda's introduction to the second volume of LVC (1963) is in itself an important document for analysing the ideological debate about *la Violencia*. However, reading Fals-Borda's introduction against the backdrop of his correspondence (in Spanish and English), written simultaneously during the debate, is even more revealing of the political meaning of this debate and its impact on Fals-Borda.

As Fals-Borda wrote to the theologian and Presbyterian Minister, John Mackay, the impact of the book was so great that it has caused a major political upheaval: the Conservative Party interpreted the book as an attack and reacted with fury, including

³⁵ Henderson, *Modernization*, 406.

³⁶ Fals-Borda, *The Sacred and the Violent: problematical aspects of development in Colombia* (Paper presented in the Conference 'Obstacles to Social Change in Latin America' organised by the Royal Institute for International Affairs, at Chatham House, London February 1965). ACH-UN, FAFS, 1965, Box 1415, folder 04, documents_20-22.

personal campaigns against the three authors. 'No one remembers a more intense and heated debate in recent years,' he wrote.³⁷ The debate, Fals-Borda explained to his colleague P. Deutschmann, 'has rocked the national cabinet twice already, it has required daily editorials in the national press for and against for a number of months, it has promoted public and secret meetings of the National Congress.'³⁸ In a letter to Rev. John Sinclair, Fals-Borda mentioned 'the threat of a coup d'état'.³⁹

This clash with the Conservative Party had a recent antecedent. The debate on the book LVC, published in July 1962, had arisen immediately after the student strike that same month. 'The worst crisis that we have faced since this Faculty was organized,' as Fals-Borda wrote to D. G. Marshall, chairman of the department of Rural Sociology, University of Wisconsin: 'We [Fals-Borda and Camilo Torres] were on guard and crying against the first open danger of McCarthyism in this University. Many professors and most of the students gathered [around us] proclaiming liberty of teaching and opinion. We have gained the support of the Liberals and the left, but the enmity of the Conservatives.'⁴⁰

Thus, the attack was not only against the book and its authors but also against the faculty that Fals-Borda had founded three years earlier. 'The Conservative Party, using as a mouthpiece one Jesuit priest, were seeking to close this school or to request my

³⁷ Letter to John Mackay, Maryland, on 29 September 1962. ACH-UN FAFS, 1962–1964, Box 1413, folder 3_23.

³⁸ Letter to Paul Deutschmann, Director of the Inter-American Programme of Popular Information, on 13 November 1962. ACH-UN FAFS, 1962–1964, Box 1413, folder 5_19.

³⁹ Letter to John Sinclair, the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations, New York, on 21 November 1962 ACH-UN FAFS, 1962–1964, Box 1413, folder 3_12; Letter to E. A. Wilkening, Department of Rural Sociology, University of Wisconsin, on 15 October 1962. ACH-UN FAFS, Box 1413, folder 3_31.

⁴⁰ Letter to D. G. Marshall, chairman, Department of Rural Sociology, University of Wisconsin, USA, on 20 July 1962; Box 1413, folder 3; Letter to Charles Hardin, The Social Science, Rockefeller Foundation, New York, on 20 June 1962. ACH-UN FAFS, 1962–1964, Box 1413, folder 4_12. After his defence of the students' strike, Camilo Torres, professor and chaplain of the University, was indirectly removed from his duties at the University through the office of the Cardinal.

resignation: they accused me of being a Protestant,' Fals-Borda wrote to his colleague, E. A. Wilkening.⁴¹ On this particular aspect, Fals-Borda also wrote to Rev. Sinclair: 'Ha sido un proceso muy interesante, aunque difícil y peligroso para los autores y para la escuela que dirijo. Pero lo más extraordinario fue la forma como se ensañaron contra Monseñor Guzmán, principalmente por el hecho de haber colaborado con un protestante como yo. Varios editoriales se dedicaron a atacarnos por ese motivo.'⁴²

In his communication to Rev. Mackay, written a few days after Father Gonzalez published his 'La Violencia en Colombia: Análisis de un Libro', Fals-Borda wrote: 'A Jesuit father wrote a reply to the book with the express purpose of disqualifying the authors as scientists [mixing up different parts of the book] to make me appear as a scientist bent with sectarian and value judgments.'⁴³

These attacks prompted Fals-Borda to publish almost immediately other works on other less 'hot' themes of research. In his letter to Deutschmann, co-author with Fals-Borda of the monograph *The Communication of Ideas among the Colombian Peasantry*, Fals-Borda explained his decision to bring forward the publication of this study: 'The seriousness of the methods presented in our monograph, the statistical analysis, etc., all demonstrated very well the relative maturity of our science.' And he concludes: 'Please excuse this unilateral decision, justified only on the grounds of the great and dangerous pressures which were exerted on us locally.'⁴⁴

⁴¹ Letter to E. A. Wilkening, Department of Rural Sociology, University of Wisconsin, USA, on 15 October 1962. ACH-UN FAFS, 1962–1964, Box 1413, folder 5_54.

⁴² Letter to John Sinclair, the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations, New York, on 21 November 1962. ACH-UN FAFS, 1962–1964, Box 1413, folder 3_13.

⁴³ Letter to John Mackay on 29 September 1962. ACH-UN FAFS, 1962–64, Box 1413, folder 3_31.

⁴⁴ Letter to Paul Deutschmann, Director of the Inter-American Programme of Popular Information, on 13 November 1962. ACH-UN FAFS, 1962–1964, Box 1413, folder 5_19.

In October, Fals-Borda wrote to Wilkening: 'The storm, however, has apparently blown over, leaving us battered but victorious. Since they could not close the School of Sociology or obtain my resignation either. The Liberals and other influential people marshalled to our aid. Now we are preparing the second volume.'⁴⁵ Among these 'other influential people' was Professor Luis Lopez de Mesa, whose article 'Un historial de la Violencia' went even further and inculpated the high ranks of the Conservative Party, mentioned the existence of a torture centre two hundred metres away from the Presidential Palace and revealed the central government's plan to move the paramilitary group Los Pájaros to Bogotá (*El Tiempo* 30 Sept 1962).

Lopez de Mesa's intervention added fuel to the fire, although it diverted temporarily the attacks away from LVC's authors.⁴⁶ However, as Fals-Borda put it, the directors of the national newspapers had decided not to open 'Pandora's box,' so they called the debate to a halt.⁴⁷ A series of external factors contributed to calming down the debate: In October 1962 the Banco Internacional de Construcción y Fomento issued a favourable report on the Faculty of Sociology's role in the social development of rural communities.⁴⁸ The Ford and Rockefeller foundations as well as USAID approved the funding for the faculty's programmes.⁴⁹ Additionally, the faculty had become an international reference point for teaching and research. In October 1962, the faculty was appointed to host the VII Latin American Congress of Sociology for 1965.⁵⁰

⁴⁵: Letter to E. A. Wilkening, on 15 October 1962. ACH-UN FAFS, 1962–64, Box 1413, folder 5_54.

⁴⁶ Letter to Enrique Valencia, México, on 05 October 1962. ACH-UN FAFS, 1962–1964, Box 1413, folder 3_38.

⁴⁷ Letter to Armando Samper, Director Instituto Interamericano de Ciencias Agrícolas, Costa Rica, 26 October 1962. ACH-UN FAFS, 1962–1964, Box 1413, folder 5_25.

⁴⁸ Reporte Banco Internacional, no. 135, 4. ACH-UN FAFS, 1962–1964, Box 1413, folder 3_40.

⁴⁹ The Faculty's training programmes such as those for community development workers, sociologists and social workers had received approval by the National Planning Board and USAID. Letter to Fulton Freeman, Ambassador of the United States of America, on September 1962. ACH-UN FAFS, 1962–1964, Box 1413, folder 3_58. Also letter to Charles Hardin, The Social Science, The Rockefeller Foundation, 30 August, 1962. Box 1413, folder 3_63.

⁵⁰ Letter to Professor Alfredo Poviña, Cordoba, Argentina, on 14 September 1962. ACH-UN FAFS, 1962–1964, Box 1413, folder 3_1.

Furthermore, Fals-Borda's analysis on *la Violencia*, based on his analytical chapter for the first volume of LVC, had been well received in the First World Congress of Sociology, Washington, 1962.⁵¹

Fals-Borda's conclusions over the debate 'in the heat of the moment' can be summarised in two parts. First, in relation to the book, in his letter to John MacKay he commented: 'In all the crying not a single argument of fact presented in the book has been disqualified or proven wrong. The attacks have been on our persons — they might take down with them the Faculty of Sociology and me.'⁵² The second point, a political one, was made in his letter to Armando Samper, Director of the Instituto Interamericano de Ciencias Agrícolas, Costa Rica: 'Sabrás que las campañas desatadas por las derechas no tuvieron ningún resultado visible, excepto la demostración evidente de lo superficial de nuestra democracia del Frente Nacional. El sectarismo sigue casi a flote.'⁵³

Contrary to what Fals-Borda said in his letter to Samper, the campaign did have an almost immediate and significant effect. In 'La Reacción al Libro sobre la Violencia' (written six months after this debate, see next section), Fals-Borda himself noted that the three main conservative factions, which had been in dispute since the creation of the National Front, united for the first time to face the crisis provoked by the book.⁵⁴ The implications of this alignment, unnoticed in his correspondence, and only briefly

⁵¹ The paper was read on Fals-Borda's behalf since he did not attend the congress. After the student strike of June, Fals-Borda was elected Regent of the University, and the congress overlapped with the election of the new President of the University. Letters from Fals-Borda to professor Rose K. Goldsen, on 5 September 1962; Andrew Pearse, on 28 August 1962; Wickham, The Ford Foundation, on 12 September 1962; Professor Forrest La Violette, Department of Sociology, Tulane University, Louisiana, USA, on 14 September 1962, explaining the reasons for his absence from the congress. ACH-UN FAFS, 1962–1964, Box 1413, folder 3_7-24; 34; 56.

⁵² Letter to John Mackay on 29 September 1962. ACH-UN FAFS, 1962–1964, Box 1413, folder 3_31.

⁵³ Letter to Armando Samper, on 26 October 1962. ACH-UN FAFS, 1962–1964, Box 1413, folder 5_25.

⁵⁴ ACH-UN, FAFS, 1962–65, Box 1460, folder 03_42.

mentioned in the draft, were the object of attention in the introduction to LVC (1963), which will be analysed in the next section.

3. A pioneering essay on the sociology of knowledge

In mid-1963, almost one year after the debate, Fals-Borda wrote the draft of an introduction to the second volume of LVC. Entitled ‘La Reacción al Libro sobre la Violencia,’ and divided into three chapters, it is an exhaustive, chronological exposition of the critics of LVC.⁵⁵

Although the draft departs significantly from the personal views and informal style used in Fals-Borda’s letters (above), it still includes personal references, emphatic rejection of accusations and touches of irony. But refinement of these aspects was not the essential difference between the draft and the final text, published in December 1963. The radical difference was that the final essay followed a particular method of analysis.

Fals-Borda by and large followed Lerner’s conceptual framework for analysing the social reception of a book; however, in his analysis of the data he used Mannheim’s Sociology of Knowledge instead of Lerner’s Modernisation theory.⁵⁶ As Fals-Borda explained: ‘Nuevas técnicas de análisis se están diseñando. Pero que sepamos a muy

⁵⁵ ACH-UN, FAFS, 1962–65, Box 1460, folder 03_1–44.

⁵⁶ In his ‘The American Soldier and the Public’, Lerner analysed the way mass media influence public opinion, some of them with the aim of helping expand the American sphere of influence, and analyses both attitudes and roles in the public reaction to a book. Daniel Lerner, ‘The American Soldier and the Public,’ in *Continuities in Social Research: Studies in the Scope and Method of ‘The American Soldier,’* ed. Robert Merton and Paul F. Lazarsfeld (New York: The Free Press, 1950), 212–220. By considering Lerner’s framework, Fals-Borda analyses: 1) the type of relation established by the critics themselves with the book: ‘Cómo se estratifica el reseñador o comentador, es decir si en relación con el libro se y sus autores se considera, como superior, inferior o neutral;’ 2) the type of information they produced: ‘Cómo se polariza el reseñador, es decir, si se considera amistoso, hostil o neutral’. The combination of these two elements provided Fals-Borda with six binomial categories to analyse the criticism of LVC. Fals-Borda, Introduction, LVC (1963), 43–52.

pocas se les ha dado el enfoque histórico que en nuestra opinión es esencial para entender los procesos de conocimiento dentro del contexto sociológico.’⁵⁷

As mentioned in the introduction, LVC was intended as the first volume of a series of studies on *la Violencia*. To this end, criticism of the first volume was conceived as an essential input. Although the criticism of LVC turned out to be much harsher than its authors expected, and not focused precisely on the book as such, Fals-Borda used that material to undertake a study on the social representations of *la Violencia*. By analysing the different ways in which politicians and the press legitimised their understandings of the social conflict, Fals-Borda not only wrote a pioneering essay on the sociology of knowledge but also shed light on the role of ideological elements in preventing the consensus on a national narrative on *la Violencia*. The following two sections will outline the material Fals-Borda analysed in his introduction to LVC (1963). For the purpose of this discussion the analysis will focus on his conclusions rather than on the description of the method.

3.1. *La Violencia en Colombia* and the basis for a national narrative

‘Distressing as it was’, wrote Fabio Simonelli in the first review published of LVC, ‘the book’s thoroughly documented account of the conflict in the rural areas sadly bears faithful witness to the most recent history of the country’ (*El Espectador*, 12 July 1962). Three days later, in the same newspaper, the Conservative leader and future president of Colombia, Belisario Betancur, 1982–1986, agreeing with Simonelli, acknowledged that the main causes of *la Violencia* were social inequality, fanaticism and a political system

⁵⁷ Fals-Borda, introduction LVC (1963), 17.

which deterred social change by democratic means. He concluded that ‘social revolution’ was the alternative (*El Espectador*, 15 July 1962).

A senior member of the military, Colonel Valencia Tovar, in response to the request of his superior, General Ruiz Novoa, Minister of War, wrote a would-be classified report on the book.⁵⁸ Valencia’s report stated that LVC’s relevance consisted not only in being the first non-politically biased study of *la Violencia* but also in increasing awareness of the structural crisis of the country, and hence it was a first step towards practical solutions: ‘La forma objetiva como se enfoca el problema en sus orígenes y desenvolvimiento, la indudable imparcialidad exteriorizada por los autores y la penetrante fuerza sociológica que caracteriza al estudio ... no puede en sana lógica acentuar el error, sino contribuir a disiparlo si esto es posible’ (*El Espectador*, 19 December 1962).

Colonel Valencia Tovar, an advocate of the ‘sociological management of the violence’, as was the Minister of War, had consolidated his reputation after de-escalating peacefully the conflict involving the guerrillas in the so-called *república independiente de Vichada*.⁵⁹ In stark opposition to those who called for punitive and repressive measures, Valencia Tovar highlighted that the book’s accusations against the military forces’ participation in the conflict were unimpeachable, and that most of them were already recognised by the military. With ironic tone, the Liberal leader Juan Lozano argued that the book was pointless since it described a ‘situation that was well known to everybody’ (*El Tiempo*, 1 August 1962).

⁵⁸ As will be seen later on, the report, written on 8 August 1962, was leaked to the Conservative Representative in November, reigniting the debate on the book.

⁵⁹ ‘Para mí y para quienes cultivábamos esta forma de pensar no se trataba de exterminar el bandolerismo, sino de suprimir las causas que lo habían generado ... el combate tendría que ser el último expediente necesario para un país responsable de haber credo unas situaciones que lanzaron a tantos colombianos por el camino de la barbarie violenta.’ General Valencia Tovar. Interviewed by Fernando Cubides, *Camilo Torres: testimonios sobre su figura y su época* (Medellín: La Carreta, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2011), 165–190. Valencia Tovar, friend of Camilo Torres, was in charge of the patrol who killed Torres.

Based on the reviews published in the main newspapers and magazines between mid-July and late September 1962, 'constructive criticism', as Fals-Borda called it, dwelt on the following five elements:⁶⁰

1) the country was in urgent need of an authoritative and unbiased study such as LVC in order to understand and seek solutions for the conflict.⁶¹

2) It was acknowledged that *la Violencia* was the result of a structural breakdown of the main socio-political institutions — the legal system, in particular, which facilitated high levels of impunity. Indeed, Arturo Avella, director of *El Siglo*, stated that '*la Violencia se origina en la impunidad que es de dos clases: la impunidad de los delincuentes vulgares y la impunidad de los altos dirigentes políticos*' (*Semanario Político*, 13 February 1962).

The same opinion was held by the Minister of War, for whom the failure to tackle the breakdown of the legal system would inevitably lead to continuing violence (*El Siglo*, 05 October 1962). The Attorney General shared the same view: '*Pensar que la fuerza oficial dominará la violencia es simplificar el problema y, por lo mismo, desconocerlo, ya que la más grave violencia sólo podrá ser combatida efectivamente ... mediante una esencial reestructuración social y económica, ya que es precisamente la estructura social y económica actual la que engendra esa violencia*' (*El Espectador*, 23 August 1962).

3) Despite emphasising the responsibility of Colombian society as a whole, the reviews did not conform with the version that *la Violencia* was the result of a 'reserve of savagery' in the peasantry and that it was inevitable.⁶² Voices such as that of the Minister of War assured during a parliamentary session that the orders to kill peasants in the hinterland came from despatches in Bogotá: '*Todos sabemos aquí ... que no fueron las fuerzas armadas las que ordenaron a los campesinos arrasar familias enteras*

⁶⁰ Fals-Borda, introduction LVC (1963), 22–26.

⁶¹ Simonelli, *El Espectador* 31 July; Gerardo Tamayo, *El Espectador*, 19 August. 1962; Latorre Gómez, *El Tiempo*, 19 May 1962.

⁶² President Alberto Lleras's speech on the day he took office. See Chapter 2, section 2.1.

para que no quedara ni la semilla del adversario. Fueron los senadores, los representantes y los jefes políticos' (*El Tiempo*, 27 September 1962). Moreover, for the critic and writer Luis Lopez de Mesa, the book LVC fell short of pointing both to the direct responsibility of the central government in the way *la Violencia* was deployed and to the electoral aims pursued (*El Tiempo*, 30 Sept 1962).⁶³ In a much more conciliatory tone, ex-president Alberto Lleras recognised that 'the irresponsibility of politicians will make the country suffer the long-lasting consequences of *La Violencia*' (*El Espectador*, 19 August 1962).

4) The recognition that *la Violencia* brought about an enormous transformation among the Colombian peasantry. Like the 'sorcerer's apprentice', as Fals-Borda put it, 'the political leadership ignored the forces they were toying with'.⁶⁴ Indeed, signs of contempt for the lives of the rural population did not pass unnoticed by the Mexican journalist, Carlos Coccioli, who pointed out that on the threshold of *la Violencia* a high-ranking Conservative politician had declared publicly that to kill a political adversary could not be regarded as a crime, neither by divine nor human justice.⁶⁵ Unlike the passive peasantry of the nineteenth century, described by LeGrand, rural populations were no longer the easy prey of their bosses' fanaticism.⁶⁶ For a number of reviews, the 'moral crisis', or 'ethical collapse', resulted from the inherent contradiction between social change and the maintenance of traditional and outmoded political, religious and legal institutions.⁶⁷

⁶³ López de Mesa, *El Tiempo*, 30 September 1962.

⁶⁴ Fals-Borda, 'The Violence in Colombia,' preface, in ACH-UNC, FA-FAFS, 1963, Box 1460, folder 3_50.

⁶⁵ Coccioli, 'Colombia bajo La Violencia,' *Revista Siempre*, n. 485, (1962): 12.

⁶⁶ Catherine LeGrand, 'Agrarian Antecedents of the Violence,' in *Violence in Colombia. The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective*, ed. Charles Bergquist et al. (Wilmington, Delaware: SR Books, 1991), 31-50; see also Fals-Borda, *Subversion and Social Change in Colombia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 34-37.

⁶⁷ 'Se trata de un cambio de actitudes frente a las estructuras, a los dirigentes y a la propia antigua mentalidad del pueblo' (*El Espectador* 23 August 1962). 'Lo que trajo consigo una inédita perturbación ética, un realce de la sevicia.' (*El Tiempo*, 26 July; 30 September 1962; *El Espectador*, 7, 11 October 1962).

5) The critics underlined the book's warning that a new conflict was gaining ground. In the wake of the proliferation of groups of bandits, most of them orphans whose familiarity with violence turned them to a life of crime, the Ministry of War acknowledged that mere repressive means would not be effective in eliminating further violence (*El Espectador*, 23 August 1962). Even the Attorney General stated that the government's proposal for introducing capital punishment would be totally ineffective in bringing the bandits' violence to an end: 'La violencia continuará, con o sin pena de muerte, mientras no desaparezcan las profundas causas que la determinan' (*El Espectador*, 23 August 1962). In the two houses of the Congress, however, the political conflict was simplified to a problem of crime and social order; in response, the government announced an emergency plan of all-out war to repress all subversive groups or criminal gangs which, according to Simonelli's estimation, comprised more than 7,000 rebels.⁶⁸

The government's refusal to differentiate between *bandoleros* (bandits) and belligerent guerrillas not only deepened the crisis but also accentuated the conflict between those who sought to halt the violence by eradicating its social causes and those who called exclusively for punitive methods.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ *El Siglo* 28 August 1962; *El Espectador* 17 September 1962. Sánchez and Meertens's relevant study on the complex net of relations between gangs, peasants and local bosses, giving place to what the authors called 'political banditry', revealed that there were still more than a hundred active gangs in 1964, some of them networked with criminals and politicians to produce fearsome regional structures with the capacity of challenging the state. Such an unprecedented figure in the history of banditry in Western societies was possible due to two factors: 'Apoyo militante o pasivo de las comunidades rurales de su misma identidad partidaria, y segundo, ... protección y orientación de gamonales que, utilizándolos para fines electorales, los empujaban a una guerra de exterminio, debilitamiento o contención de sus adversarios en la estructura de poder local o regional. Sánchez and Meertens, *Bandoleros, gamonales y campesinos: El caso de la violencia en Colombia*. 1983. 2nd ed. (Bogotá: Editora Aguilar, 2011), 74.

⁶⁹ As Coronel Valencia Tovar recalls, the punitive approach carried more weight: 'Existían disposiciones superiores que ordenaban denominar a cada combatiente contra el cual se chocaba como bandolero. Yo fui adverso a esta denominación, que tuve que emplear por razones de disciplina, pero siempre consideré que había que establecer una diferencia y que no por denominar bandolero al guerrillero deja de serlo...' Cubides, *Camilo Torres*, 189.

3.2. The violence against *La Violencia en Colombia*

This part of the chapter aims to analyse why Fals-Borda refers to LVC as one of its authors' greatest frustrations: it examines why, in spite of being praised and well received by international academics, LVC failed in shaping national public opinion about *la Violencia*.⁷⁰ An answer can be found by looking at the political debate arising from the first volume of LVC.

The constructive criticism of the book came to a halt when it began to be used in the Congress by both Liberals and Conservatives as a tool of mutual recrimination. In a parliamentary session on 25 July 1962, the Liberal Senator Ciro Ríos, quoting LVC, remembered the Conservative Senator Salazar García of his direct participation in some episodes of *la Violencia*. Salazar García argued in response that the book was just one of the many lies written against the Conservative Party.⁷¹ Almost simultaneously, ex-president Laureano Gómez's son, Álvaro Gómez, after a long sarcastic recrimination against the authors, concluded that the book was 'un relato mañoso y acomodaticio, respaldado por unos documentos secretos' (*El Siglo*, 1 August 1962). This was the

⁷⁰ John Martz, stated that LVC, 'an essentially non-partisan study', was 'a pioneering effort for all serious Latin Americanists'. Review of LVC, in *The Hispanic American Review*, Vol. 43, no. 2 (1963): 303-305. Gino Germani noted that LVC was the 'first comprehensive report to be published [on *la Violencia*]' and also which 'took considerable personal courage on the part of the authors not only to carry on the field work but also to publish the results of their observation and analysis. Review of LVC, in *American Sociological Review*, vol. 29, n. 3 (1964): 433. Similar opinions in Samuel Wallace, *Caribbean Studies*, Vol 4. N. 1. (1964): 64; Charles Erasmus, *American Anthropologist*, vol. 65, no. 6 (1963): 1421. Recalling his years in Bogotá, Hobsbawm said: 'What exactly the *Violencia* was or had been about was far from clear, although I was lucky enough to arrive just at the time when the first major study of it was coming out. To one of whose authors, my friend the sociologist Orlando Fals-Borda, I owe my first introduction to Colombian problems.' Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times, A Twentieth-Century Life* (London: Abacus, 2003), 373. According to Gonzalo Sánchez, '[LVC] revela en la escena pública "la gran verdad" de la violencia bipartidista, incluso, rompiendo los silencios que se estaban pactando por arriba. El "choque" entre lo uno y lo otro, es monumental, gigantesco para la época.' Sánchez, interviewed by Jefferson Jaramillo Marín, published in 'El libro La Violencia en Colombia (1962-1964): Radiografía emblemática de una época tristemente célebre.' *Revista Colombiana de Sociología*, vol 35, no. 2 (2012), 44.

⁷¹ Fals-Borda, introduction LVC (1963), 24.

beginning of an escalation of mutual accusations between Liberals and Conservatives which turned into a campaign to discredit the book.

While avoiding comments on any particular part or topic of the book, the Conservative press claimed LVC was a sectarian analysis of *la Violencia* packed with libellous accusations against ‘the historical dignity of the Conservative Party’:

La interpretación parcializada y el sectarismo, descarado o latente, dominan todas las líneas, desde las páginas iniciales ... hasta el capítulo final, donde el sociólogo del grupo emplea todo su arsenal de vocablos “técnicos” para presentar al conservatismo, al ejército, la policía y el gobierno como responsables exclusivos de todos los crímenes que su colega el señor Guzmán ha relatado con morbosidad insana en la primera parte del panfleto (*El Siglo*, 15 September 1962).⁷²

On 23 September 1962, the Jesuit, Miguel Ángel González, published in *Revista Xaveriana* as well as in all the Conservative press his article ‘La Violencia en Colombia: análisis de un libro.’ It was an extensive review carried out with the aim of proving three propositions: first, the authors had acted in bad faith; second, the book lacked scientific foundations; and third, it was inopportune published. In a very well-coordinated action by the Conservative Centre of Colombian Studies, the leaflet was distributed in the churches and universities of the main cities in Colombia. From Father González’s standpoint, the book was not only scientifically groundless but also socially and morally inconvenient.⁷³ However, what really had a significant impact on the public reception of the book was the last line of the Jesuit’s review, which pointed out

⁷² In the same vein: *El Siglo*, 19 August; 13, 20 September; 1, 5 October; 4, 7, 11 November 1962.

⁷³ ‘La historia montada sobre tales “métodos de investigación” [teoría del conflicto e interpretación funcionalista] no tiene ninguna seriedad científica y por tanto tal “historia de la violencia” no puede servir de base a una verdadera sociología ... Una investigación sociológica, para que sea verdadera, además de ser auténticamente científica, debe ser ante todo moralmente justa, útil para un fin honesto y constructivo en relación al bien particular o al bien común de la sociedad. ¿Sería posible afirmar, sincera y cristianamente, que el libro comentado reúne estas cualidades? Ciertamente no.’ Miguel Ángel González, ‘La Violencia en Colombia: análisis de un libro,’ *Revista Xaveriana*, tomo LVIII, n. 288 (1962): 512.

that the book had no 'imprimatur'.⁷⁴ Almost immediately the Cardinal declared that Father Guzmán had not solicited authorisation from the Curia to publish the book and hence its authors were entirely responsible for the content.⁷⁵

By accusing LVC's authors of 'mischievous moral conduct' on the ground of the lack of 'imprimatur', González allowed the Conservative press, which publicised González's statements, to move from criticising the 'poison book' to attacking its authors: a 'renegade' priest and friend of criminals, a Protestant sociologist, and a freethinker lawyer — whose personal backgrounds made them incompetent to analyse the Colombian reality. For the Conservative press such a team was highly suspicious.⁷⁶

The so-called 'newspapers war' reached a peak when the LVC and its authors were accused of inciting the people to violence and hence of being responsible for its continuation: '*La Violencia en Colombia* es una incitación al resentimiento, a la cólera, a la renovación de las pasadas recriminaciones, al sectarismo político.'⁷⁷ After four months of acrid debate, the book LVC, according to journalist Panglos, had provoked more verbal violence than the physical one described in its pages (*El Espectador*, 28 Nov 1962). Indeed, the debate reached such a high level of intensity that the directors of both *La República* and *El Tiempo* convened a national meeting of newspaper directors so as to call a halt to the dispute among the press and to align themselves with the aims of the National Front.

⁷⁴ Ecclesiastic permission established by the Ecclesiastic Code, canon 1,386 since the book had been co-authored by a priest. González, 'La Violencia,' 512.

⁷⁵ *La Prensa*, 27 September; Guzmán et al., LVC, (1963), 29.

⁷⁶ See also *El Siglo*, 15, 20, 25, 28 September; 1, 4 October; *la República*, 23, 24 September.

⁷⁷ González, 'La Violencia,' 512. 'Todo indica que la ofensiva contra la violencia, también debe orientarse contra los "sociólogos" de vieja o de última hora, que han demostrado ser mejores franco-tiradores que los llamados guerrilleros' (*El Siglo* 1 October 1962).

Consequently, with the exception of the *Diario de Ibagué*, thirty-five newspaper directors subscribed to a declaration of intent to condemn any form of violence regardless of its reasons and origin. Among other points, they agreed ‘to avoid any polemic on the political parties’ responsibility for *la Violencia*, leaving such judgment for a future generation, who would be less implicated and more objective’. Additionally, in accord with the declaration, they would avoid mentioning the political affiliation of either the victims or the perpetrators. The latter would be described with no adjectives other than ‘criminals’.⁷⁸ Authoritative voices such as ex-president Ospina Pérez and the Minister of the Interior Fernando Londoño, added that any attempt to analyse the origins of *la Violencia*, or the responsibilities for it, might destabilise the National Front. In their own assessment: the National Front was established so as not to speak of *la Violencia* anymore.⁷⁹

This agreement, however, had a short life. Only one month later the front page headlines announced that the Conservative Senator Marin Vargas was calling for a private debate in Congress with the Minister of War about Colonel Valencia Tovar for his report on the book LVC, which had been leaked to Marin Vargas. Valencia Tovar’s report on 8 August strongly recommended that the book be studied by the military. For Marin Vargas, however, this could only serve to spread a sectarian attack on the Conservative Party (*El Siglo*, 11 November 1962).

The clash between Marin, an active figure in *la Violencia* in the states of Santander and Boyacá, and the Minister of War, who had ordered the report, escalated through a series of parliamentary sessions. The debate was at boiling point when the Minister challenged Marin to a duel on the basis that the latter’s accusations were false and against the

⁷⁸ *El Siglo, El Tiempo, La Republica, El Espectador*, 5 October 1962.

⁷⁹ Fals-Borda, introduction LVC (1963), 49.

honour of the military. Marin, who refused the Minister's challenge, claimed to be acting to protect the army's dignity from the harmful accusations of LVC. The newspaper *La Nueva Prensa*, which sided with the Minister, argued that Marin's criticism was mere resentment at the army's refusal to be the Praetorian Guard of the Conservative Party (*La Nueva Prensa*, 3–9 November 1962). In an attempt to underplay the issue at stake in the debate on *la Violencia*, ex-President Roberto Urdaneta, Laureano Gómez's vice-president, who was in office as President due to Gómez's illness, 1951–1952, wrote an article in which he declared that the violence occurring during the 1950s was something normal since 'it has happened in other countries and at any time' (*La República*, 2 December 1962).

In the draft of the LVC's introduction (1963), Fals-Borda wrote that the three main conservative factions which had been united for the first time to face the crisis provoked by the book, ratified their alliance at the beginning of 1963, and, in turn, consolidated the National Front, which was then under a Conservative president. In fact, on 24 December, *el bachiller Cleofás Pérez* — President Alberto Lleras's pseudonym — wrote that after mutual agreement between the Liberals and the majority of the Conservatives, the debate about LVC was concluded since it was 'perjudicial y violatorio del programa de la Gran Coalición que recomienda no perturbar con la política el funcionamiento de las instituciones armadas' (*El Tiempo*, 24 December 1962). As Fals-Borda recalled, this was the last public incident in relation to LVC.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Fals-Borda, introduction LVC (1963), 42.

4. The end of *la Violencia* and the beginning of revolutionary violence

The end of the debate on the book LVC marked the beginning of a new stage of political violence in Colombia — a stage which has extended to the present day.

In 1964, banditry and the remaining guerrillas became the National Front's main issue of contention. According to Senator Alvaro Gómez, then leader of the radical Conservative faction, revolutionary guerrillas were leading 'independent republics' in the areas where the state had been traditionally weak, which he denounced as a threat to governmental sovereignty.

Between 1963 and 1965, military strategy proved successful in exterminating the groups of bandits. Eighty-eight ringleaders were killed and a number of gangs were dismantled.⁸¹ In the light of these results, the radical wing of the Conservative Party insisted on denying political recognition to the guerrilla groups which would have meant having to deal with them as political opponents, rather than as mere criminals.⁸² In spite of previous success of social intervention in deescalating the conflict in two of the seven 'independent republics', the government announced the bombing of Marquetalia — a peasant enclave which had set up its own government, a standing army and communal farming.⁸³ The authors of LVC, Fals-Borda, Umaña and Germán Guzmán, together with Camilo Torres plus other intellectuals such as Gerardo Molina, Hernando Garavito and the priest Gustavo Pérez, created the Independent Commission on Peace to mediate between the government and the guerrilla groups. The government agreed to accept the commission's intervention provided the two priests obtained

⁸¹ Sánchez and Meertens, *Bandoleros*, 330.

⁸² As General Valencia Tovar acknowledged in his interview with Fernando Cubides, it was a serious mistake to deal with the guerrillas as if they were mere bandits. Interviewed in Cubides, *Camilo Torres*, 173; 178.

⁸³ John W. Hart, 'Topia and Utopia in Colombia and Peru: The Theory and the Practice of Camilo Torres and Gustavo Gutiérrez in their Historical Contexts' (PhD thesis, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1978), 116.

Cardinal Concha's approval for their participation in the negotiations. On the zero-hour day, *El Tiempo*'s headline read: 'Negado permiso a sacerdotes para ir a Marquetalia. Por medio de comunicación del Cardenal al Ministro de Guerra' (1 May 1964). Two days later, *El Espectador* reported; 'Queda suspendida la Misión a Marquetalia por desautorización del Cardenal' (3 May 1964). On 18 May the government went ahead with its plan to bomb Marquetalia.

In spite of the massive scale of the 'Marquetalia Operation', coordinated and technically supported by the U.S. military operation LASO (Latin American Security Operation), it proved unsuccessful. The mountains and jungle of Marquetalia were subjected to bombing with napalm, strafing and spraying with black measles virus. More than two thousand people were taken prisoners and hundreds were executed summarily.⁸⁴ More than 1,200 military were deployed in the operation to dismantle a guerrilla group of no more than fifty fighters.⁸⁵ Ironically in 1965, after the escape of a handful of poorly armed men from the then shattered Marquetalia region, the country saw the beginning of mobile guerrilla units, which after subsequent Communist formation, became in 1965 a revolutionary force, the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC).⁸⁶

In mid-1965, the army operation also started operations against the Sumapaz, the last of the 'independent republics,' a region where organised peasantry had resisted the attacks of landowners since the late 1920s and where state violence in the 1950s found a tough and organised response. These nuclei of peasant self-defence groups were liquidated by the army. As Régis Debray, a French scholar who followed Ché Guevara to Bolivia,

⁸⁴ Sánchez and Meertens, *Bandoleros*, 338-339; Hart, 'Topia and Utopia,' 117.

⁸⁵ Alfredo Molano, 'Comisión Histórica del Conflicto y sus Víctimas' (CHCV) (2015), 38-42.

⁸⁶ An analysis of the transformation of self-defence guerrillas into revolutionary insurgency in Fernán E. González, *Poder y violencia en Colombia* (Bogotá: CINEP, 2014), 303-316.

pointed out: 'This double defeat [Colombia and Bolivia] signifies the end of an epoch and attests to the death of a certain ideology.'⁸⁷

The emergence of ideological guerrilla groups at the same time as Camilo Torres concluded that armed insurrection was the only instrument for procuring social change in a highly segregated society (split between traditionally rich families and the vast majority of poor Colombians) coincided chronologically and symbolically with Laureano Gómez's death in July 1965.

A form of ideological struggle died with Laureano Gómez: the struggle between 'good' (the Hispanic Catholic tradition that Laureano Gómez fiercely defended) and 'evil' (Communism, Socialism, Liberalism that he labelled under the same tag and battled against). In 1953, after Rojas Pinilla's coup d'état, Laureano Gómez's dream of a theocratic–corporative regime like that of Franco's Spain had been buried. His return to the political arena in 1957 had been more pragmatic than ideological. His function was to put together the National Front, alongside the Liberals whom he had previously abhorred, at the price of his lifelong ideological tenets. In fact, in the wake of this agreement, Laureano Gómez admitted and apologised for the 'oratorical excesses that were taken as signalling their approval of physical excesses on the part of their followers'.⁸⁸ Laureano Gómez's biographer, J. Henderson, concluded that the Conservative leader died as most of the moderate members of his generation, the Generation of the Centenary, either Liberals or Conservatives, had lived: moderates 'who eschewed ideology and concentrated instead on the creation of wealth'.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Debray referred to the Bolivian peasants who invaded the mines in the state of Potosi in 1965. Debray, *Revolución en la Revolución* (Montevideo: Editorial Sandino, 1967), 27.

⁸⁸ Henderson, *Modernization*, 420.

⁸⁹ The Generation of the Centenary, or Centenarians, were those young politicians who entered public life at about the time Colombia celebrated its first century of Independence in 1910. These were the

Henderson seems to overlook that wealth-creation did not clash with political ideology. On the contrary, it was a form of ideology; an ideology around which social conflict revolved during the next two governments of the National Front. This will be analysed in the next chapters. Creation of wealth in itself was not the issue at stake. The question asked by those groups not represented by the establishment was: How can the political structures which enabled wealth creation for the elite be transformed in order to ameliorate the daily conditions of the majority of Colombians living in poverty? As Fals-Borda pointed out, the formalisation of 'the National Front as a one-party government' was possible because it was officially limited to sixteen years, 1958–1974; however, the agreement was drawn up in such a way that individual and class vested interests were in practice able to extend the agreement indefinitely. 'The symptoms are alarming', he said. 'There are Liberals who think, write and act like Conservatives... and there are Conservatives who have moved toward classic liberalism. But almost no one has really moved toward the people.'⁹⁰

From sociology of knowledge towards critical thinking

The second volume of LVC was published less because of the desire to provide a response to the acrid criticism of the first volume than because of the need to reiterate that a clear-sighted and dispassionate analysis was essential to shed light on *la Violencia*. As stated in the previous chapter, the second volume of LVC (1963) came

presidents, politicians and business men who ruled the country between 1930 and 1953 belonging to this generation. 'These years,' as Henderson points out, 'might justifiably be referred to as the reign of the Centenarians'. Henderson, *Modernization*, 25. This abandoning of traditional politics in Colombia was confirmed one decade later by President Alfonso Lopez Michelsen himself, who would recognise at the end of his administration that 'today we have class struggle more than party struggle. Thus the theme of how to make peace between liberals and conservatives is no longer topical; rather the debate is between friends of the "status quo" and those who aspire to a different order.' President Alfonso Lopez Michelsen, an interview in *Revista Causa Común*, n. 1 (1977): 19.

⁹⁰ Fals-Borda, *Subversion*, 156.

out after a series of ‘round tables’ organised by Fals-Borda, Dean of the Faculty of Sociology, and the first national conference on sociology in 1963.⁹¹ During this time, Fals-Borda was making arrangements to have LVC published in an English-language edition, which eventually did not happen.⁹² The second volume was published amid civil society’s desperate calls for solutions to the ever-intensifying organised crime. In effect, the second volume of LVC was a new effort to raise awareness of what might be the continuing consequences of *la Violencia* should its causes not be eradicated.

Despite what Fals-Borda called LVC’s failure, the book constituted the main reference until the late 1980s when new research analysed regional and local expressions of the conflict in the 1950s. Furthermore, it laid the foundations upon which Fals-Borda built up his intellectual, social and political criticism. As he stated, his essay on the sociology of knowledge aimed to reflect the spectrum of ideas and attitudes of the public opinion and the ruling class with regard to the conflict in Colombia.⁹³ This in turn, helped Fals-Borda re-define his own approach to the ideological issues underlying the new stage of the conflict. Until LVC, his analysis of the national conflict was guided by practical motivations rather than by an ideological driver. ‘To your surprise,’ Fals-Borda recalled for an interview in 2005, ‘I had never had classes on Marxism in the United States, at no university. I had not read Marx, not even when I wrote this final chapter of LVC. In this chapter I only get to the stage of the theory of social conflict. But our attitude and intention as sociologists talking about this phenomenon demonstrated that there was a need for an inner transformation, and this is what we called commitment’.⁹⁴ In fact, the

⁹¹ Letters from Fals-Borda to Camilo Torres, Aaron Liman, Eugen Havens, Germán Guzmán, José Gutiérrez, Andrew Pearse and Eduardo Umaña Luna on 29 March 1963. In this letter Fals-Borda maintains that due to the intensification of the violence in various areas of the country, and in spite of the first volume having been used as *almohadilla política*, their work as social researchers is still incomplete. ACH-UN, FAFS 1962–1963, Box 1460, folder 04, documents_46-52.

⁹² Correspondence of Fals-Borda and Umaña Luna with editors between May and October 1963, ACH-UNC, FA-FAFS, 1963, Box 1460, folder 4_1-9; 65-67.

⁹³ Fals-Borda, introduction LVC (1963), 53.

⁹⁴ Cendales, et al., ‘One sows the seed,’ 24-25.

way the oligarchic political system handled the aftermath of *la Violencia* — an attitude ‘permeated by myopic liberal and neoliberal policies that reflect a social class self-centeredness’ — led Fals-Borda to seek the ideological element of *la Violencia* less in the incendiary rhetoric of resentful individuals than in the continuation of the institutions, interests and mentalities of those political groups re-established within the bi-partisan coalition in 1958.⁹⁵

In spite of most attacks on LVC having come from the Conservative Party and its defence from some Liberals, Fals-Borda did not look at the ideological debate about LVC from a bipartisan perspective. He saw, beneath such an apparent clash between the Conservatives' ruthless rhetoric and the Liberals' moderation, a bi-functional structure: on the one hand, the politics of gentlemen's agreement in order to preserve political myths such as the ‘historical dignity of the parties’, on the other, a network ready to promote fanaticism and hatred among the rank-and-file.⁹⁶

Moreover, the mechanism to rationalise or negate the parties' responsibility for the conflict was related to their intrinsic inability to find solutions to the structural problems underlying the ongoing violence. In this light, the pact of oblivion was not only a convenient agreement between the two parties but also the result of the structural and technical incapability of the legal system to enforce justice. Indeed, the incendiary rhetoric against the foe and the zealotry for perfectly-written constitutions made up for this practical inability to conduct significant social change.⁹⁷ This understanding was

⁹⁵ Fals-Borda, ‘Action Research in the Convergence of Disciplines.’ *International Journal of Action Research*, vol. 9 no. 2 (2013): 162.

⁹⁶ Fals-Borda, introduction LVC (1963), 53.

⁹⁷ Fals-Borda, introduction LVC (1963), 54-55.

a key element during this period, in which the main elements of Fals-Borda's ideological critique were already in the making.

Finally, LVC also included a personal aim for Fals-Borda. His research on the critical problems posed by *la Violencia* was, as he put it, a way of pursuing 'la dignidad histórica de nuestra generación' — 'La Generación de la Violencia a la cual tuve el infortunio y también el privilegio del reto de pertenecer'.⁹⁸ This also helps explain the existentialist dimension of Fals-Borda's sense of frustration mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

⁹⁸ Fals-Borda, 'Nuevos Rumbos y consignas para la sociología en Colombia,' discurso pronunciado en el Aula Máxima de la Universidad Nacional, 28 October 1965, ACH-Fondo Orlando Fals-Borda (FOFB). Digital. Folder Congresos_Asociaciones_1er_Congreso_Sociología_4; Fals-Borda, prologue LVC, 23.

Chapter Four

Justice and Liberation:

The Theological Bases of Fals-Borda's Social Ethics

Fals-Borda's reputation as analyst of political violence in Colombia became inextricably associated with his book *La Violencia en Colombia* (LVC) (1962, 1963). Although this study was Fals-Borda's first polemical work on *la Violencia*, it was by no means his first and only critical contribution — as the next chapters will show.

In fact, and interestingly, his first approach to *la Violencia* was not academic but musical: an expression of 'incipient musical sociology,' as he put it.¹ As director of the Presbyterian Choir in Bogotá, Fals-Borda composed a polyphonic piece of music named 'Mensaje a Colombia', after the assassination of the liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in April 1948.² More than fifty years later, on 28 May 2003, when 'Mensaje a Colombia' was performed by the Philharmonic Orchestra and the Polyphonic Choir of the National University, Fals-Borda stated in his short speech: 'En 1948, cuando lo compuse conmovido por la catástrofe del comienzo de la Violencia, esa pieza expresó una esperanza de redención que no pudo tener eco. Tampoco cuando me convertí en sociólogo y junto con respetados colegas, estudié más a fondo tan trágico destino.'³ He was referring to the attempts to silence his book LVC after its publication in 1962.

¹ Archivo Central e Histórico Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Fondo Orlando Fals-Borda (ACH-UN, FOFB). Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Iglesia_Presbiteriana_Música Coral_23.

² Fals-Borda started to work on this composition in October 1948 at the same time as he was preparing to direct J. S. Bach's Christmas Cantatas, which he presented in three different cities during Christmas 1948. It was the choir's first national tour. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Iglesia_Presbiteriana_Música Coral_45-52.

³ Fals-Borda, 'Speech' on 28 May 2003. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Iglesia_Presbiteriana_Música Coral_19.

When ‘Mensaje a Colombia’ and two other pieces also composed in 1948 were played at the First Presbyterian Church of Barranquilla in January 2002, Fals-Borda recalled that these pieces of music as well as a few others he wrote during his years at the University of Dubuque, where he was one of the tenors of the choir, were religious but also inspired by a sense of patriotic duty. These compositions expressed concern for the need of social reconstruction — something like a resurrection.⁴

According to Fals-Borda’s own memories, what attracted him most in the church alongside the choral music were the activities of the Presbyterian Youth Centre.

In an interview in 2005, Fals-Borda remembered:

I was very connected to the church, very connected, to such an extent that one of these missionaries who used to come invited me to become a pastor. But my activities were much more than religious ones, they went beyond religion ... I was involved not only with music; I was also the director of a Presbyterian Youth Centre (PYC). That was interesting. The pastor of that church was Richard Shaull, who would later become one of the founders of liberation theology. My great friendship with Shaull went on, and when he was appointed as a pastor to the Presbyterian Church in Bogotá, it happened that I also moved there.⁵

Although Fals-Borda’s memories revolved around his passion for choral music and his involvement in the youth centre in the late 1940s, this chapter brings evidence which shows that Fals-Borda’s personal beliefs and religious faith were deeply influential throughout the period analysed in this thesis, 1948–1974.

In 1980, the historian and journalist Alfredo Molano pointed out that the principles upon which the Rosca Foundation built up the dialectics between theory and action,

⁴ Regarding these compositions Fals-Borda wrote: ‘Las había empezado cuando con mis amigos del Centro Juvenil Presbiteriano sentimos el impacto desastroso de la revolución del 9 de Abril [1948]. Con ellas quise combinar las preocupaciones políticas con la esperanza de una intervención superior y divina para sacar a nuestro país de los peligros inminentes. Mi plegaria entonces sigue vigente.’ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Iglesia_Presbiteriana_Música_Coral_22-23.

⁵ Lola Cendales et al, ‘One sows the seed, but it has its own dynamics: An interview with Orlando Fals-Borda,’ *International Journal of Action Research* 1, no. 1 (2005): 11-12.

intellectuals and peasantry, oppression and liberation, were not so much political as moral in nature. Molano considered the fact that three of the five co-founder members were Presbyterians, two of them pastors, was very significant and must not be ignored.⁶ However, not until 2010 when Perez Benavides published his Master's dissertation, with the prologue by one of the co-founders of the Rosca, Rev. Castillo-Cárdenas, did the influence of the religious element in Fals-Borda's ethics receive some attention.⁷ In this prologue, Castillo-Cárdenas pointed out that Fals-Borda's notion of 'commitment' was inspired by both Camilo Torres's praxis and by the Presbyterian theologian Richard Shaull who delivered an 'intriguing' presentation on the Theology of the Revolution at the World Conference on Church and Society of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1966, which Fals-Borda also attended.⁸ Castillo-Cárdenas concluded his prologue by stressing the relevance of this event in defining the ecumenical nature of both the Rosca Foundation and the method of Participatory Action Research (PAR).⁹ For his part, Perez Benavides's main contribution consisted in providing information on the religious influence on the young Fals-Borda.¹⁰ He also highlighted the conflict between Fals-

⁶ Molano Alfredo, 'La Rosca Orígenes.' 1980. Unpublished. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Investigación_Acción_Participativa, sub-folder Fundación_Rosca, Rosca_Investigación_Acción_Social. Orígenes_204; 217-218.

⁷ Castillo-Cárdenas's presentation of the religious background of Fals-Borda's ethics is divided into three stages that he labelled as: altruist, committed and social praxis. Each one corresponds, in turn, to one stage of Fals-Borda's professional development, namely, involved with the Alliance for Progress, the Rosca Foundation and the systematisation of PAR. Castillo-Cárdenas, Introduction to *La Influencia Religiosa en la Conciencia Social de Orlando Fals-Borda*, by Isay Pérez Benavides, (Barranquilla: Corporación Universitaria Reformada, 2010), 16-21. For a criticism of this type of approach to Fals-Borda's career into clear-cut stages, see Chapter 1, Introduction.

⁸ 'Uno de los expositores fue el joven teólogo Richard Shaull, ya conocido y admirado por Orlando [Fals-Borda] desde la época del Centro Juvenil Presbiteriano de Barranquilla, allá por los años 1940s. Shaull que a la sazón había animado movimientos juveniles de vanguardia en el Brasil, hizo en la Conferencia una presentación sorpresiva y arriesgada: habló sobre "la teología de la revolución". Aunque no hay evidencia de que esta intrigante excursión teológica, anterior a la Teología de la Liberación, hubiera hecho conexión con la visión espiritual y ética que Orlando [Fals-Borda] había recibido de sus padres y de la Iglesia hasta ese momento, lo que sí queda claro es que tanto Camilo Torres como la Conferencia de Ginebra imprimieron aún más en Orlando la necesidad del "compromiso" como componente imprescindible de la práctica social.' Castillo-Cárdenas, introduction, 17.

⁹ Castillo-Cárdenas, introduction, 19.

¹⁰ At Fals-Borda's home, during his education at the American School and the Youth Centres of the Presbyterian Church of both Barranquilla and Bogotá. He acknowledged Shaull's important influence upon the young Fals-Borda during his work as coordinator of both the youth centre in Barranquilla and the choir of the Presbyterian Church in Bogotá in 1948.

Borda and the Synod of the Presbyterian Church in Colombia, which ended in the excommunication of Fals-Borda in 1972. It is notable that Perez-Benavides's dissertation remains the only secondary source available with regard to the significance of religion in Fals-Borda's early years.

However, this chapter will not attempt to build on Perez Benavides's approach. In fact, it departs from the religious question to focus on the theological foundations of Fals-Borda's ethical thinking — a topic thoroughly neglected so far. Therefore, this chapter's hypothesis is that ethical-theological concerns (and not only religious principles) are the weight-bearing structure of Fals-Borda's critique of the violence. Consequently, the chapter differentiates between 'religious influence' (group-related beliefs and norms of conduct) and 'theological involvement' (discussion about the role that religious institutions or individual faith play in the public sphere).¹¹ Without exception, biographical reviews have praised Fals-Borda's unshakable ethical principles.¹² In this chapter, his ethical praxis is not only a matter of Fals-Borda's individual principles or norms of conduct; it is a matter also related to the social dimension of justice. As the report of the 1966 WCC World Conference put it: 'The discernment by Christians of what is just and unjust, human and inhuman in the complexities of political and economic change, is a discipline exercised in continual

¹¹ Johannes Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (London: Burns and Oates, 1980), 7-9.

¹² Cfr. Jaime Eduardo Jaramillo, introduction to *Antología*, by Orlando Fals-Borda (Madrid: Agencia Española de Cooperación internacional para el Desarrollo, Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y de Cooperación, 2010), 13. Gabriel Restrepo referred to 'resonancias del espíritu profético hebreo: una indeclinable esperanza en la redención de las deudas, una confianza absoluta en el cumplimiento de la idea jubilar de la justicia, pero al mismo tiempo una conciencia trágica en torno a la dura realidad de un mundo cifrado en la existencia del mal, cuya expresión encarna el abuso del poder y la humillación de los humildes.' Restrepo Gabriel, 'Cuando cae el telón principia la obra: en memoria de Orlando Fals-Borda,' *Espacio Abierto* vol. 17, no. 4 (2008): 600.

dialogue with the biblical resources, the mind of the Church through history and today, and the best insights of social scientific analysis.’¹³

With this distinction set in place, this chapter argues that Fals-Borda’s involvement in the renewal movements of both the Protestant and the Catholic churches was crucial to his abandoning the positive functionalist framework of sociological reference; and consequently, to his ideological shift between 1966 and 1969. Indeed, the question about the relationship between theory and practice was primarily ideological rather than methodological. It referred to the question: ‘To whose benefit?’ In 1969, Fals-Borda replied: ‘In my case, to those groups which strive for social change in all honesty.’¹⁴ Ten years later, Fals-Borda re-affirmed his convictions. Regarding his ‘Investigating Reality in order to Transform It,’ he wrote to Anisur Rahman: ‘You will note that my concern was on praxis, and specifically on the relationship between theory and practice in a concrete situation: work with deprived peasants here.’¹⁵

The chapter, divided into four sections, follows as far as possible a chronological order: Section 1 introduces two theological elements, namely, John Mackay’s ‘Christ of Tangiers’ and Camilo Torres’s ‘efficacious love’, which influenced Fals-Borda’s understanding of social ethics and commitment in the early 1960s. Section 2 analyses a paramount experience in Fals-Borda’s career: his involvement as a Presbyterian in both the Latin American Committee on Church and Society and in the preliminary discussions and preparation between 1963 and 1966 for the WCC World Conference. For the Protestant Churches this conference was the equivalent of the Catholic Vatican

¹³ World Conference on Church and Society of the World Council of Churches. *Official Report* (Geneva. WCC, 1966), 201.

¹⁴ Fals-Borda’s letter to Juan F. Marsal, on 3 November 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones Internacionales, Sub-folder Europa II_Suiza_36.

¹⁵ Letter on 22 October 1979. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Correspondencia_Internacional, Sub-folder Suiza_1979_03. ‘Investigating Reality,’ was presented at the symposium of Cartagena on Action Research, 1977 (see Chapter 6)

Council II, 1962–1965. It was also an attempt to formulate a Christian social ethics to cope with the moral issues in an age of technical and social revolutions. Section 3 looks at the impact upon Fals-Borda's intellectual journey of, first, Shaul's theology of revolution and second, ideas about theology and contemporary revolutions discussed at the 1966 WCC World Conference. Section 4 focuses on the profound transformation undergone by the Catholic and the Protestant theologies in Latin America in the late 1960s, for which a close relationship between theology and social science was essential. For Fals-Borda (a believer, well informed theologically) the emerging Liberation Theology became integral to the mystique and value structure that motivated his struggle against the traditional elite class in the early 1970s.

The main sources of information used here are the letters, documents and unpublished writings collected from three different archives:

- 1) the Central and Historical Archive of the National University, Bogota, Colombia (both Fondo Orlando Fals-Borda (FOFB) and Fondo Acumulado Facultad de Sociología (FAFS));
- 2) the archive of the Presbyterian Historical Society of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.;
- 3) documents of the World Conference on Church and Society, 1966, from the Archive of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. Most of these documents had remained unstudied until now. Additionally, a great many of Fals-Borda's published works and key secondary sources in relation to liberation theology have been consulted.

As will be analysed in the closing chapter, Fals-Borda's theological basis constitutes, *par excellence*, the Benjaminian element of his ideology critique. This Benjaminian characteristic appears in at least two correlated forms. First, it re-signifies the way history and social thinking are related to each other. By taking issue with Horkheimer's notion of irreparable injustice, Benjamin stressed that 'history is not simply a science

but also and not least a form of remembrance. What science has “determined,” remembrance can modify’.¹⁶ Second, as Benjamin explained, such remembrance is theology, an ‘experience that forbids us to conceive of history as fundamentally atheological’. However, as he warned, little will be achieved in trying to write such experience with specifically theological concepts.¹⁷ As Benjamin concluded: ‘My thinking is related to theology as a blotting pad is related to ink. It is saturated with it. Were one to go by the blotter, however, nothing of what is written would remain.’¹⁸

1. The ethical-theological question in the throes of secularism

1.1. The sacred: the theological perspective of John Mackay

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the theologian Richard Shaull played an important role in establishing the social basis of Fals-Borda’s ethical thinking; however, the first theological influence revealed in Fals-Borda’s early sociological works was not Shaull’s but that of the theologian John Mackay, with whom Fals-Borda cultivated a friendly relationship.

It has been assumed that the hallmark of Fals-Borda’s Protestantism was the use of biblical references like the epigraph of his Master’s dissertation: *Peasant Society* (1955), as Gabriel Restrepo argued.¹⁹ One must not be distracted by re-interpretations of

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 471 (N7a,8).

¹⁷ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 471 (N7a,8).

¹⁸ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 471 (N7a,7).

¹⁹ The sociologist G. Restrepo has suggested a psychoanalytical interpretation of this epigraph. For him, Fals-Borda’s identification with *Esther* reflected Fals-Borda’s feeling of ‘guiltiness’ since he was criticising the establishment whilst being a public servant. Restrepo referred to the Spanish edition 1961, when Fals-Borda worked for the Ministry of Agriculture and the National University; however, he seems to ignore that the book he was talking about was Fals-Borda’s MA dissertation, written in 1953 and published in English in 1955 when he was finishing his PhD at the University of Florida. Restrepo Gabriel, ‘Cuando cae el telón principia la obra: en memoria de Orlando Fals-Borda,’ *Espacio Abierto* vol. 17, no. 4 (2008): 600-601.

the epigraph since the main influence of Protestant theology on Fals-Borda's early works was the framework for analysing the ethical question posed by the conflicting transition from a sacred to a secularised society in rural Colombia.²⁰

As described by Fals-Borda, the sacred referred to the endurance of a colonial type of society and ingrained in the cultural ethos as a result of the combined action of:

'1) the family, a conservative group *per se*, 2) the permeating influence of religious institutions which are also conservative and actively desirous of maintaining the status quo, and 3) the adverse life-situation produced by the political institutions'.²¹

The ethics resulting from this ethos is the ethics of otherworldliness: 'Ethics based on the importance of life in heaven, which served, on the side, to maintain the people quiet in their suffering, passive and subdued politically.'²²

Otherworldliness, which comprises both a promised heaven and the threat of hell, was combined with a sense of fatalism nourished by a belief in a Christendom whose values were biased to favour dominant groups. The path to salvation presented to the people was, says Fals-Borda, 'thorny and winding, heavy like the very cross of Jesus' — such a philosophy of life was embodied in the suffering and thorn-crowned Christ of Tangiers: 'A marginal saint who was to find many ghastly niches in the Colombian churches.'²³

The contrasts and contradictions between the 'Christ of Tangiers' and the 'redemptive Christianity of the Spanish mystics' was first analysed by John Mackay, a Scottish

²⁰ This approach framed the analysis of *ethos* in his *Peasant Society*, his sociological studies: *La Violencia in Colombia*, Chapter 13; and two studies: 'Bases for a Sociological Interpretation of Education in Colombia' (Draft English version with Andrew Pearse's comments and suggestions). ACH-UN, FAFS 1961, Box 1415, Folder 04; and 'The Sacred and the Violent: Problematical aspects of Development in Colombia' (Paper presented in the Conference Obstacles to Social Change in Latin America, organised by the Royal Institute for International Affairs, at Chatham House, London February 1965). ACH-UN, FAFS. 1965. Digital. Box 1415, Folder 04.

²¹ Fals-Borda, *Peasant Society*, 232.

²² Fals-Borda, 'The Sacred and the Violent: problematical aspects of development in Colombia.' ACH-UN, FAFS. 1965. Digital. Box 1415, Folder 04_7.

²³ Fals-Borda, 'The Sacred and the Violent,' Box 1415, Folder 04_8.

missionary to Peru,²⁴ in his *The Other Spanish Christ*. Mackay's argument was that the image of Christ introduced by the conquistadores was that of a Christ who was born and died, but who never lived — another Christ wanted to come, but His way was barred.²⁵ The contemplation of Jesus Christ as either a helpless child in his mother's arms or a suffering victim had a cathartic value for South American worshippers but had no ethical meaning: 'Their exclusive interest in Christ's meaning for death and immortality has led them to ignore the One who by the lake-side told men how to live.'²⁶

The book, according to the theologian R. Padilla, 'became a classic and is still regarded as one of the best explanations of the *raison d'entrée* of Protestant Christianity in a Roman Catholic continent.'²⁷ Examination of historical development and ideas of Spanish and Latin American thinkers enables Mackay to conclude that the Christ of popular religious traditions in Spain was still the Christ of the then present-day Latin American Catholicism.²⁸ Mackay named this process of acculturation as 'South-Americanization of the Spanish Christ' — an important "safety valve" but ethically insignificant'.²⁹

As Fals-Borda noted in his analysis of *la Violencia*, the traditional values of the sacred system proved to be as useful for justifying passivity as for deploying violence. Since the sacred represented an integration of the ecclesiastical, political and social structures,

²⁴ In the mid-twentieth century, Mackay was one of the leading Presbyterian missionaries in Latin America. He aroused the interest of a number of young Presbyterians, among them, Richard Shaull. Shaull Richard, Application for Missionary Service, question 49. Presbyterian Historical Society, United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (PHS, UPC-USA) Shaull, Rev. Millard Richard, Folder 1, RG360.

²⁵ John Mackay, *The Other Spanish Christ: A study in the Spiritual History of Spain and South America* (London: SCM Press, 1932), 111. It was published in Spanish in 1952.

²⁶ 'Known in life as an infant and in death as a corpse [...] whose permanent reality resides in a magic wafer bestowing immortality.' John Mackay, *The Other Spanish Christ*, 102.

²⁷ René Padilla, 'Evangelical theology in Latin American contexts,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed., Timothy Larsen (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 261.

²⁸ For instance, the Nicaraguan poet and President Ruben Dario, the Spanish writers Azorin, the philosopher Miguel de Unamuno and the Argentinian intellectuals Ricardo Rojas and Juan B. Terán

²⁹ John Mackay, *The Other Spanish Christ*, 112.

one of the collateral effects of *la Violencia* was the breakdown of the original mechanical and habit-forming religious acculturation of the peasantry.³⁰ Furthermore, the incongruent role of some civic and ecclesiastical agents as makers of violence deepened the existing crisis of a sacred natural order.³¹

As a Protestant, who in principle rejected the sacred character of political structures, Fals-Borda's analysis of the religious question found a consistent framework in Mackay's humanism of freedom. According to this, Catholic thought-structures stood in stark contrast with the Calvinist ethos, which demanded an attitude of confidence in man's power to shape the world.³² Fals-Borda's analysis of the sacred in his writing in the early 1960s was framed by the conflict between authoritarian (theocratic-type) institutions striving to preserve a sacred order, and secular modern institutions which demanded a wider base of social participation. In a country such as Colombia where the national identity was synonymous with membership of the Roman Catholic church, the role of Protestant theology was to defend religious freedom and the right for this church to exist. Indeed, in his arguments opposing the Liberals' bill for the law of religious freedom in 1935, Archbishop Perdomo persuasively argued that in Colombia where ninety-nine per cent of the population was Catholic such a law would be a serious mistake. As he wrote: 'A state which adopts religious freedom not only would forego one of the most effective means to obtain citizens' obedience and veneration but also would shake the foundations of religious beliefs which are the inexhaustible source of strength and Christian resignation to the anxieties and miseries of people's lives' (*El Tiempo*, 14 November 1935).

³⁰ Fals-Borda, *La Violencia en Colombia*, 451-454. Also, Fals-Borda 'The Sacred and the Violent: problematical aspects'. ACH-UN, FAFS. 1965. Digital. Box 1415, Folder 04_15.

³¹ Camilo Torres, 'Violence and Socio-Cultural Change in Rural Colombia,' in *Father Camilo Torres Revolutionary Writings*, ed., Maurice Zeitlin (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1972), 162-167.

³² Rubem Alvez, 'Protestantism in Latin America: its ideological function and utopian possibilities,' *The Ecumenical Review* vol. XXII, no.1 (1970): 9.

Thus, after the persecution of Protestants during *la Violencia*, the leading role of the Liberal Party in the establishment of the National Front in 1958 was, in Fals-Borda's view, a transition towards political and cultural modernisation.³³ In many ways it was so, considering that in 1956, General Rojas Pinilla had announced the forthcoming publication of a 'Red Book of Colombia,' in which '[Rojas] would reveal that Communists and Protestants were the real causes of the internal dissensions of the country'.³⁴ However, by the mid-1960s the theological emphasis (within an important sector of both the Catholic and the Protestant Churches in Latin America) shifted from concern for religious freedom to concern for the meaning of Christianity in a revolutionary context — the key question was no longer freedom but the role of faith in a continent regarded as Christian but deeply affected by increasing poverty and social unrest. The role of the theologians was therefore to do, not just to write, theology in a revolutionary situation.

1.2. Camilo Torres' principle of efficacious love

In 1962 Fals-Borda wrote to Rev. John Sinclair about his sister Maribell's wedding, 'perhaps the first inter-religious ceremony in Colombia. It was presided over by both the Catholic priest Camilo Torres and the Presbyterian Rev. Roberto Lazear'.³⁵ Strictly speaking, the ceremony was inter-denominational rather than inter-religious. The fact that such a ceremony had never officially taken place before in Colombia is indicative

³³ According to Goff, there were 2,046 recorded acts of violent persecution and 3,456 of non-violent. Police were the principal agents of the persecution. From 1948 to 1957, more than two hundred protestant schools were closed by official orders. In September 1953, Rojas re-enforced the existing measures against Protestantism and issued a new circular by which Protestant worship in the Mission Territory was outlawed. James Goff, *The Persecution of Protestant Christians in Colombia, 1948–1958*. (Cuernavaca, México: Centro Intercultural de Documentación (CIDOC), 1968), 23; 5/2.

³⁴ Goff, *The Persecution*, 10/29.

³⁵ Letter to John Sinclair, General Secretary of the Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations (COEMAR) of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S., on 21 November 1962. ACH-UN, FOFB. Box 1413, Folder 3_12.

of both the huge ecumenical gap between Protestants and Catholics in Latin America in the 1960s and the challenge faced in bringing the various denominations together.

In the same letter, Fals-Borda informed John Sinclair of the series of written attacks after the publication of *La Violencia en Colombia* (LVC) (1962); especially those directed at Monsignor Guzmán Campos, co-author, for his collaboration with a Protestant.³⁶ For Fals-Borda, such an experience, though painful, bore witness to seminal signs of ecumenism which, as Fals-Borda wrote, will be worthy of attention in future.³⁷ The occasion to draw attention to it came almost immediately when Fals-Borda was commissioned to analyse the changes in the Latin American Church for the preliminaries of the 1966 WCC World Conference. In this study, Fals-Borda optimistically highlighted the cooperation between two Catholic clerics [Torres and Guzmán] and a Protestant layman [Fals-Borda himself] in the creation of the Faculty of Sociology, the study of *la Violencia* and the project of agrarian reform. In spite of a rather hostile atmosphere, these were symptoms of change in inter-church relations.³⁸

As Fals-Borda recognised throughout his life, Camilo Torres influenced his ethical thinking, ideological convictions and social praxis decisively, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Indeed, the initial thrust of the Faculty of Sociology cannot be understood without taking Camilo Torres's collaboration into consideration. His privileged social position and eagerness to see the academic, political and ecclesiastical institutions moving with the times complemented Fals-Borda's intellectual and managerial skills. Camilo Torres's close contact with deprived areas had been one of his distinctive features during his years at both the Seminary of Bogotá and the University in Louvain.

³⁶ Letter to John Sinclair on 21 November 1962. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1413, Folder 3_12.

³⁷ Letter to John Sinclair on 21 November 1962. ACH-UN, FOFB. Box 1413, Folder 3_12.

³⁸ Fals-Borda 'Implications for the World Conference of Recent Roman Catholic Development in Latin America.' ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1443, Folder 6_9.

With his friend, the priest Gustavo Pérez, Camilo Torres established teams of Socio-Economic Investigation of Colombian Reality (ECISE) for young fellow-countrymen studying in Europe. One year after the first team was created in Louvain in 1955, groups were also established in Paris, London, Rome, Madrid and Berlin. The purpose of ECISE was: 'To look for unity over and above party matters... The youth today does not want to waste its energy and scientific training on sectarian disputes. We are all agreed on the idea of a preliminary examination of the reality of our country and to that end we have organised a strictly objective investigation team to inform public opinion.'³⁹

Following Catholic vanguard thinkers such as François Houtart, Gustav Thils and Canon Jacques Leclercq, Camilo Torres's ideas and attitudes regarding the mission of the Church became tightly bound to a theology based on the principles of dignity and charity.⁴⁰ Later on, his engagement with the worker-priests of Abate Pierre in Paris widened Torres's view on ecumenism and Marxism. During his years in Europe (1955–1959), Torres witnessed the emergence of movements and currents of thought calling for significant changes like that of Maritain's 'New Christianity', a 'third way' between capitalism and communism.⁴¹ Perhaps the most important movement was the one started at the Vatican with the new Pope John XXIII (1958–1963), known as 'the Pope of the people', who despite his short papacy, led the Catholic Church through a process of institutional reform: Vatican Council II, 1962–1965. The pope surprised his contemporaries with the declaration that 'the Church wants to be the church of all men and especially the Church of the poor'.⁴²

³⁹ Broderick Walter, *Camilo Torres: A Biography of the Priest-Guerrillero* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1975), 73; 77-79.

⁴⁰ In his copy of *The Poor of Yahweh* by the French priest Albert Gelin, a popular book in those days, 'Camilo underlined, the following passage: "Poverty is above all a scandal which ought not to exist ... the great prophets of Israel were the champions of the weak and never tired of denouncing oppression in all its forms.' Broderick, *Camilo Torres*, 77.

⁴¹ Broderick, *Camilo Torres*, 75.

⁴² Gutiérrez Gustavo, *A Theology of Liberation*. 1973 (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998) 162.

In May 1959, two months after the foundation of the School of Sociology by Fals-Borda and Camilo Torres, the sociologist of religion — and Torres's teacher in Louvain — François Houtart, presented a paper on changes in the religious mentality of urban dwellers, which was published as the first number of the School's series of Sociological Monographs.⁴³ Torres's awareness of the changes and crisis of Colombia's urban centres, especially as a result of the massive immigration of rural population after *la Violencia*, had immediate practical effects. He created the University Movement for Communal Development (MUNIPROC) which focused on engaging students and scholars in improving the lot of slum dwellers in Bogotá. MUNIPROC's rapid development established a solid base and assured student participation in community projects. 'The "Muniprocker" financed their own activities and thus kept themselves out of the watchful eye of official institutions like Communal Action. This meant that they were free to question some of the government's slogans and facile propaganda and to help the slum dwellers do the same. Though not yet revolutionaries, little by little Camilo and his Muniprockers were becoming radical.'⁴⁴

Beyond the national press's sensationalist coverage given to Camilo Torres's conflict with the hierarchy, there was a more essential criticism: Camilo Torres was the first priest in Colombia to contest openly the traditional assumption held by the ecclesiastic hierarchy since colonial times that the Gospel could not be preached successfully unless the secular power was subordinate or favourably disposed to support the Church's mission.⁴⁵ According to F. Houtart, 'Camilo's increasing preoccupation with the problems posed to the Christian conscience by the society in which he lived became a

⁴³ François Houtart, *La Mentalidad Religiosa y su evolución en las ciudades* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Departamento de Sociología, 1959). See also, draft with handwritten comments and corrections. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1440, Folder 1_18-32.

⁴⁴ Broderick, *Camilo Torres*, 115.

⁴⁵ See Richard Harries Funk, 'Camilo Torres Restrepo and the Christian Left in the Tradition of Colombian Church-State Relations,' (PhD thesis, University of Notre Dame, 1972), 330-338.

virtual torture.’⁴⁶ Such soul-searching, reflected in Camilo Torres’s writings, was more acute in his arguments to justify his engagement in violent revolution in the name of ethics or religion. In his ‘Platform of the United Front’, presented on 22 May 1965, he claimed that his four roles as Colombian, Sociologist, Priest and Christian had led him to embrace revolutionary struggle.⁴⁷

As will be discussed in Chapter 5, Fals-Borda’s thinking did not revolve around either Camilo Torres’s personal virtues or his conflicting advocacy of armed struggle on behalf of his Christian faith. Fals-Borda was concerned about the secular challenge to Christian membership, structures and theology that Torres’s conception of Christianity represented. Torres’s conception of love as moral imperative was at odds with the ritualistic type of religion prescribed by the *sacred* tradition of Catholicism in Colombia. As Carlos Angarita pointed out, Camilo Torres’s efficacious love contradicted the metaphysical principle *operatorious* (Instrumental cause), established in the fourth century, according to which ‘en el culto acaece plenamente la salvación, operada por el ser que, devenido de Dios, actúa y se realiza realmente allí, incluso independientemente del sacerdote sin el cual, en todo caso, no es posible que ese misterio ocurra’.⁴⁸ In other words, it questioned the theological-political basis of the ethos of Christendom ‘outside the church there is no salvation’.⁴⁹ In an unprecedented fashion, Camilo Torres declared himself in communion with those who were non-

⁴⁶ François Houtart. Interviewed by *Revista Vispera*, vol. 1, no. 1, (1967): 69.

⁴⁷ Torres Camilo, ‘Platform of the United Front of the Colombian People,’ in *Revolutionary Priest. The complete writings and messages of Camilo Torres*, ed. John Gerassi (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), 306-310. ‘I believe,’ wrote Camilo Torres after he was released from his clerical duties (June 1965), ‘that the revolutionary struggle is a Christian and priestly struggle. It is only through this struggle, in the concrete circumstances of our country, that we can love in the way men should love their neighbours.’ Camilo Torres, ‘Laicization,’ in *Revolutionary Priest*, 325.

⁴⁸ Angarita Carlos, ‘¿Eficacia del sacramento o eficacia de la caridad? Camilo Torres y el amor eficaz,’ (Paper presented at Symposium Camilo Torres 50th Anniversary of his death. Universidad Nacional, 15 February 2016). To be published by DEI Costa Rica.

⁴⁹ The axiom *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*, comes from Saint Cyprian of Carthage, c. 200–258. Joseph Pohle, ‘Religious Toleration,’ in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Accessed 12 April 2016. <http://www.newadvent.org/>

Christians, provided they have charity: 'The Christian loves, and this love distinguishes and defines him. External practices serve as a means for attaining love, and they should in turn be motivated by love. The non-Christian who loves and is seeking in good faith possesses grace. On the other hand, the Christian who carries out external practices without love is not Christian.'⁵⁰

Contrary to the metaphysical foundations of otherworldly ethics, Camilo Torres's theological arguments for supernatural life pointed to the practical implication of Christianity. The notion of 'efficacious love' not only revealed the incongruities or shortcomings of traditional Christian morality but also shed significant light on the direction of social transformation in a society undergoing an accelerated process of secularisation.⁵¹ Along with the pluralist utopia (Chapter 5), Torres's notion of 'commitment' to the less privileged — expressed in Christian terms as efficacious love — became the ideological guiding light of Fals-Borda's search of a sociology able to link social theory and political practice. As to the question of whether his work with Camilo Torres in the Faculty of Sociology of the National University was already leading to PAR, Fals-Borda replied positively:

The seed was there with Camilo's presence. His contribution was commitment, commitment to the popular struggles, to the need of social transformation ... Our attitude and intention as sociologists talking about [social conflict] demonstrated that there was a need for an inner transformation, of feeling, of attitude, and this is what we called commitment. And Camilo takes it on and transmits it to his own interpretation and afterwards to his life, his self-giving. The idea of commitment to the problems of society in order to understand them and then to solve them, is one of the roots of participatory research ... And this we owe to Camilo Torres.⁵²

⁵⁰ Torres Camilo. 'The Bidimensional Man,' in *Revolutionary Priest*, 91.

⁵¹ 'Even in the post-Vatican Council era,' Fals-Borda wrote, 'the most representative ecclesiastic groups preferred 'to close their eyes and avoid self-criticism, in order to sustain a social order that is objectively unjust.' Fals-Borda's *Subversion: A Central Concern*, ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, Sub-folder Libro_Subversión_Colombia_68.

⁵² Cendales et al, 'One sows the seed,' 23; 25.

2. The Latin American Committee on Church and Society and the preparations for the World Conference of the World Council of Churches 1966

After the storm caused by the publication of the first volume of LVC (1962), and influential conservatives' attempts to close the Faculty of Sociology or, at least, to make the Dean destitute (see Chapter 3), the years 1963 to 1965 passed unremarked by Fals-Borda's critics.

As stated in the introduction, the 1966 WCC World Conference played an important role in Fals-Borda's theological thinking not only for his attendance at the conference in July 1966 but also for his participation in the preparations and discussion during the three years beforehand. Moreover, contrary to Castillo-Cardenas's claim that there was no evidence that Fals-Borda was in contact with Shaull's 'intriguing' theological ideas before the 1966 conference, this section analyses data that not only bear witness to such contact but also point to topics of debate with which Fals-Borda was actively engaged.⁵³

The year 1963 marked the beginning of Fals-Borda's intense involvement in the renewal of the Christian Church. He became a member of the editorial board of the theological journal *Cristianismo y Sociedad* created by the Latin American Committee on Church and Society in 1959.⁵⁴ Under the leadership of Shaull, who was assessor of studies for the committee, the journal focused on the analysis of the role of the Church in contexts of ideological and political transformation.⁵⁵ This movement served to

⁵³ See footnote 8 above.

⁵⁴ Letter from Hiber Conteris, secretary publications ISAL, Uruguay, to Fals-Borda on 5 June 1963. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1462, folder 5_104.

⁵⁵ The topics addressed during the year 1963 were: 'Perspectivas cristiana de la relación entre ideología e historia en las situaciones revolucionarias'; 'Enfoque cristiano de las revoluciones latinoamericanas' and 'La comunidad cristiana en una sociedad en transformación'. Junta Latinoamericana Iglesia y Sociedad, *Journal Cristianismo y Sociedad*, no. 1 (1963): 1-3.

establish an atmosphere of discussion and debate between Catholic and Protestant theologians which, Shaull said, 'we could hardly have imagined in the former years.'⁵⁶

In June 1963, Fals-Borda attended a meeting in Saint-Cergue, Switzerland, to discuss what theological, social, political and economic issues should be included in the preparatory study of the 1966 conference. Fals-Borda was asked to deliver a presentation on the socio-cultural implications for the World Conference of recent Roman Catholic developments in Latin America.⁵⁷ Almost simultaneously, he received another invitation: from the WCC's Commission on Church and Society to join a consultation on Christian Service and Social Action, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in September.⁵⁸ Fals-Borda delivered one of the three keynotes of the consultation: 'Una Estrategia para la Iglesia Cristiana ante la Transformación de la América Latina'.⁵⁹ Days before this consultation in Brazil, Fals-Borda had delivered a talk at the Presbyterian Synod of Colombia on 'The future of the Church'.⁶⁰ In December, he presented an analysis of the Latin American socio-economic and religious reality for the 'Continental Conference on Church and Mission in Latin America' organised by the Presbyterian Commission on Cooperation for Latin America (CCPAL) in Bogotá.⁶¹

⁵⁶ After being appointed as Dean of Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil in Campinas, Richard Shaull strove, in his own words, 'to develop a type of theology that relates Gospel as vitally as possible to the realities of Brazil life,' which in turn meant to build up an ecumenical movement. The Shaulls' letter to their friends from Campinas Brazil, on 8 January 1960. PHS, UPC-USA, Shaull, Rev. Millard Richard, Folder 1, RG360.

⁵⁷ Letter from Mauricio López, Department of Church and Society CWW, on 31 May, 5 June 1963. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1462, Folder 5_102; 338.

⁵⁸ Letter from Hiber Conteris, secretary publications ISAL, Uruguay, to Fals-Borda on 5 June 1963. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1462, folder 5_104.

⁵⁹ Fals-Borda, 'Una Estrategia para la Iglesia Cristiana ante la Transformación de la América Latina.' (Consulta Rio de Janeiro Junta Latinoamericana y Concilio Mundial de Iglesia: Aspectos sociales de una estrategia para la Iglesia Cristiana ante la transformación de la América Latina, 6 September 1963). ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1462, Folder 5. Ten pages.

⁶⁰ Letter from Rev. Roberto Lazear on 5 September 1963 thanking Fals-Borda for his presentation at the Congress. Lazear wrote: 'Todos quedamos muy impresionados e inspirados por tu intervención.' ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1442, Folder 8_55.

⁶¹ Fals-Borda, 'La Realidad Socio-Económica de la América Latina y sus Relaciones con la Estructura Religiosa.' (Conferencia Continental: La Naturaleza de la Iglesia y su Misión en Latinoamérica Hoy, 1-8 December 1963). ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1441, Folder 3. Five pages.

At this conference in Bogotá, Fals-Borda had the opportunity to discuss with his friends a new project about which he had been recently contacted. Egbert De Vries from the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague, who had met Fals-Borda at the meeting in Saint-Cergue, offered Fals-Borda the position of Scientific Project Director of a study, involving several countries, of the role and impact of the Christian churches in social and economic development.⁶² The study, directed by Egbert De Vries, from ISS, and François Houtart, from FERES,⁶³ was sponsored by the Vatican and the World Council of Churches and had the financial support of the Ford Foundation.⁶⁴ In his reply to De Vries in December 1963, Fals-Borda wrote:

I have consulted with my friends, and specially with John Mackay, John Sinclair and Bishop Leslie Newbegin, who are attending a congress sponsored by the Presbyterian Committee on Cooperation. Also with Mauricio Lopez and Richard Shaull. They think highly of the project. Father Gustavo Perez, a good friend of Father Houtart, also spoke with me about it ... There is little question that the study proposed by you holds a great challenge to a scientist as well as to a Christian. Thus, it is difficult for me to deny my cooperation, although I must withhold my final decision until I am better informed about the study.⁶⁵

In November 1963, Fals-Borda had additionally received a request from Paul Abrecht and Mauricio López from the WCC's Department of Church and Society, for a contribution to the volume on 'The Christian View of Man as a Person in Community' for the preparatory documents of the 1966 Conference.⁶⁶ After the WCC Conference at New Delhi 1961, a world-wide consultation had been carried out to define the themes and issues of discussion, after which the experts for such topics had to be found.

⁶² Letter from Fals-Borda to Paul Abrecht and Mauricio Lopez, Department of Church and Society, on 4 March 1964. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1443, Folder 5_105.

⁶³ The Protestant Institute of Social Studies (ISS), The Hague, and the Catholic International Federation of Institutes for Social and Socio-Religious Research (FERES), Belgium.

⁶⁴ The study coordinated by Fals-Borda, which involved Colombia, Brazil and Tanzania, was carried out between February 1965 and April 1966. See draft letter from De Vries, and Houtart to Gama da Silva, Director of University of Sao Paulo, without date. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1415, Folder 3_62.

⁶⁵ Letter from Fals-Borda to E. De Vries on 9 December 1963. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1462, Folder 5_92.

⁶⁶ Working Committee 1963, Proposal regarding Preparatory Study volumes for the 1966 world conference on God, Man and Contemporary Society. Department of Church and Society, WCC, Geneva. ACH-UN, FAFS, 1964, Box 1462, Folder 05_274-275. Also, letter on 12 November 1963. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1441, Folder 3_05.

Fals-Borda delayed confirmation of his participation on this project until March 1964, when his participation on the ISS and FERES projects had been settled.⁶⁷ Although Fals-Borda had agreed to coordinate the study in December, and despite arrangements having been made to work on the hypothesis and bases of the project (The Hague, Mexico and New York during January 1964), Fals-Borda's appointment was not confirmed until March.⁶⁸ The Colombian Cardinal, Mons. Concha, had delayed his approval.⁶⁹

Fals-Borda's letter to Abrecht and Lopez, informing them about the reasons for his delay in delivering his paper for the volume on 'The Christian View of a Man as a Person in Community', states: 'One of the most important tasks which I will start to undertake is the coordination of the world-wide research on the impact of religious bodies on secular areas of society, with Professor De Vries and Father Houtart. This will probably help me understand much better the modern processes of secularism and urbanisation and how they impinge on such a basic institution as religion. And it could help me focus my possible paper for you.'⁷⁰ These series of studies (two of which, on Tanzania and Colombia respectively, were directly coordinated by Fals-Borda) were a systematic attempt to analyse in depth the empirical nature of the Church, designed to help churches to understand better and fulfil better their mission in the socio-economic

⁶⁷ In accordance with the directions of the working Committee of the Department of Church and Society 1962, the plans for such review were sent to 'a selected group of 200 correspondents, including theologians and laymen, all leaders of Christian social thought and action throughout the world with a letter inviting them to comment.' Working Committee of Church and Society, 'Report: Reactions to the plans for the World Conference prepared by the working committee at Paris 1962.' ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1462, Folder 05_190.

⁶⁸ Letter from F. Houtart from The Hague to Fals-Borda on 19 December 1963. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1462, Folder 5_12.

⁶⁹ In a letter addressed to Houtart, Fals-Borda put forward what he considered to be the cause of the Cardinal's attitude: His article 'Bases for a Sociological interpretation of Education in Colombia,' was criticised by Mons Romero, Cardinal Concha's personal secretary, and a Jesuit whose article entitled 'La Sociología Religiosa de Orlando Fals Borda' published in *Revista Xaveriana*. He refers to this episode as 'una salida que casi me cuesta la cabeza,' meaning he almost lost his post as Dean of the Faculty. Letter to François Houtart on 15 April 1964 ACH-UN, FS 1964-, Box 1443, Folder 06_3.

⁷⁰ Letter from Fals-Borda to Paul Abrecht and Mauricio Lopez, Department of Church and Society, on 4 March 1964. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1443, Folder 5_105.

development of the world. The method was that of an objective sociological enquiry, leading to a theological appraisal.⁷¹

One week later, Mauricio López wrote back to Fals-Borda reiterating their invitation to collaborate in the preparation of the preliminary documents for the WCC conference: 'En cuanto a tu colaboración con los volúmenes preparatorios de estudio, comprendo que te será difícil tener listo el trabajo para la fecha apuntada. Es posible sin alterar nuestros planes ofrecerte una prolongación de este plazo ... Personalmente, creo que los latinoamericanos de tu calidad deben estar presentes también en estos trámites preparatorios de la conferencia Mundial de 1966.'⁷² In November 1964, Fals-Borda handed in his paper: 'The Challenges of the New Urban Mass Civilization' for the volume on *Man and Contemporary Society*, the aim of which was to prompt a dialogue between theologians and social scientists — a crucial aspect for a re-examination of the theological basis of ecumenical social thinking.⁷³

In 1965, with the collaboration of Camilo Torres, Fals-Borda organised in Colombia the programme of Ecumenical Dialogue, whose topic of discussion was 'the Role of the Christian Church, in the present day, in Latin America'.⁷⁴ At the end of March 1965, Fals-Borda wrote to his friend Lynn Smith: 'Thanks a lot for your last two letters. I have been unable to proceed with the writing of my paper for you — and the book [on Agrarian Reform] — due to my recent trips to Europe and Africa (Tanzania) and to the

⁷¹ Letter from Victor E. W. Hayward, Executive Secretary Department of Missionary Studies WCC, on 18 April 1963. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1462, Folder 5_108.

⁷² Letter from Mauricio López, Department on Church and Society WCC, to Fals-Borda on 9 March 1964. ACH-UN, FAFS, 1964, Box 1443, Folder 05_104.

⁷³ Working Committee 1963, Proposal regarding Preparatory Study volumes for the 1966 World Conference, WCC, Geneva. ACH-UN, FAFS, 1964, Box 1462, Folder 05_274. Fals-Borda, 'The Challenges of the New Urban Mass Civilization,' in *The Christian Contemporary Problems of Man as Person in Community* (preparatory volume 1966 World Conference on God, Man and Contemporary Society, 1964). ACH-UN, FAFS, 1964, Box 1462, Folder 05. Fifteen pages.

⁷⁴ *Diálogo Ecuménico*, organised by Fals-Borda, key notes: priests Camilo Torres and Martín Amaya, and Protestants speakers: Jorge Lara-Braud, Mexico; Samuel Araya, Chile; Waldo Cesar, Brazil; Key Yuasa, Brazil; and Gonzalo Castillo-Cárdenas, Colombia. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 14183, Folder 39_2.

pending business back home.’⁷⁵ During the years 1964 and 1965, the discussion of the Church’s involvement in the process of social transformation in Latin America had indeed become a priority that Fals-Borda combined with this academic agenda.⁷⁶

In the above-mentioned letter to Smith, Fals-Borda told him: ‘I am settled again, and helping the Rector as much as I can in his fight to make a new university out of the National ... Last week we were able to consolidate five old faculties into one (the “fiefs” are being terminated). Our graduate school starts on April 19. We are all excited at the prospects.’⁷⁷

3. Subversion and theology of revolution

After his resignation as a Dean of the Faculty of Sociology of the National University in Colombia, Fals-Borda requested an official commission to go abroad for one year in order to ‘return to science and research’. The immediate aim, as he wrote to D. Sandberg, was ‘to refresh my sociological training and to write my book — pending for three years — on peasant transformation in Colombia’.⁷⁸

The book Fals-Borda wrote during his year as visiting professor at the University of Wisconsin was *Subversion and Social Change in Colombia*, 1967, which significantly differed from the original project. Fals-Borda’s dedication to and analysis of Camilo Torres’s utopianism has hitherto led the critics to assume the topic of this book was mainly inspired by the revolutionary priest.

⁷⁵ Letter on 29 March 1965. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1415, Folder 3_48.

⁷⁶ Letter from Victor E. W. Hayward, Executive Secretary Department of Missionary Studies WCC, on 18 April 1963. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1462, Folder 5_102; also documents attached: Folder 5_106-116.

⁷⁷ Letter on 29 March 1965. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1415, Folder 3_48.

⁷⁸ Letter to D. Sandberg, on 17 March 1966, ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1415, Folder 6_3.

What has been previously overlooked is the fact that the month before Fals-Borda arrived in Wisconsin he had attended the World Conference of the WCC 1966.

As Castillo-Cardenas, an attendee at the event, recalled, Richard Shaull surprised the audience with a presentation on theology of revolution. By looking at the historical, doctrinaire and biblical Christian tradition, Shaull sought to lay the foundations for a theology of Christian praxis in a revolutionary context. Shaull's missionary experience in both Colombia and Brazil had convinced him that 'revolution was the only route by which Latin American peoples can move from their dehumanizing status quo to a higher plane of life'.⁷⁹

Indeed, Fals-Borda's project of approaching the concept of subversion from the positive point of view, rather than the negative as it appears in the dictionaries, came after Shaull's advocacy of revolution. As Fals-Borda recalled: 'I met Shaull again in Europe when he was already a liberation theologian ... I was invited to hold a conference on Latin American problems in a lecture series in which Shaull had already participated. I had some texts written by him and chose a topic that was premonitory: "Subversion and Development in Latin America."' ⁸⁰ In 1970, Fals-Borda introduced his presentation at the 11th Annual Foyer John Knox Lecture, stating that for his lecture on 'Subversion and Development' he would attempt the same heterodox course already indicated by Shaull's notion of 'systematic subversion of institutions,' according to which only a systematic subversion can ensure essential social transformation.⁸¹

Shaull, for his part, totally identified with Fals-Borda's sociological approach to the point that he not only wrote the first review in English on *Subversion and Social*

⁷⁹ Grounds Vernon, *Revolution and the Christian Faith* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1971) 37.

⁸⁰ Cendales et al., 'One sows the seed,' 12.

⁸¹ Fals-Borda, 'Subversion and Development: The Case of Latin America,' *NEWSTATEments* vol. 1, no. 2 (1970): 12.

Change (see Chapter 5) but created an organisation, the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) with headquarters in New York, with the two-fold aim of supporting the political struggle in Latin America and establishing a similar strategy of subversion in the U.S.⁸²

However, it would be incorrect to assert that Shaull was the only source of inspiration for Fals-Borda's writing on subversion between 1966 and 1970.⁸³ First, because some constitutive elements had been already elaborated by Fals-Borda himself, as can be appreciated both in his presentations and in his contributions to the conference.⁸⁴

As Fals-Borda's handwritten preparatory notes for *Subversion and Social Change* show, he not only took into consideration Shaull's presentation but also some of the sources used by the latter, in particular Ernst Bloch's *Thomas Münzer, Theology of Revolution* (1921), and Marx and Engels's *On Religion* (1842) and *The Sacred Family* (1845).⁸⁵

⁸² 'At the present time,' Shaull wrote, 'the prospects for such democratic action for change are not good. In several countries, military dictatorships make such political organisation impossible, except as it occurs underground ... Any attempt, therefore, to concentrate our attention on lobbying in Washington or struggling for minor changes at one point or another will not get to the heart of the matter. We must concentrate on a quite different and definitely long-term approach. In other words, our task in the USA is to develop here, in relation to U.S. policy toward Latin America, a strategy of subversion similar to that which Fals-Borda suggests for his own country.' Shaull, review of *Subversion and Social Change*, by Fals-Borda, *NACLA Newsletter*, December (1967). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, Sub-folder Libro_Subversión_Colombia_123.

⁸³ Particularly *Subversion and Social Change*, (1967, 1968, 1969) and a series of five essays written and presented in English at the Institute of Latin American Studies London University (1968), published in Spanish with the title of *Las Revoluciones Inconclusas de America Latina* (1969), and also in English as 'Marginality and Revolution in Latin America: 1809-1969,' (1970/1971).

⁸⁴ See 'Comments for discussion on nationalistic and political movements in the world' World Council of Churches Archives (WCCA), Series of the 1966 Conference, ref: 243/13/01, description: Orlando Fals-Borda's comments Section IV on 14 July 1966 (written on paper of the Hotel Continental), six pages. On this participation in the World Conference, Fals-Borda wrote to the theologian John Mackay: 'I had the honor of presiding at one of the sections on "Man in Community." We had awfully nice people in this section. Then I was given the opportunity to speak before the entire Conference, and I elaborated a few thoughts on the role of counter-elites and the importance of projective research. A copy for you is enclosed. I hope you like it.' Letter from Wisconsin University, where Fals-Borda had just arrived as visiting professor, on 1 August. ACH-UN, FOFB. Folder Documentos_Personales, Sub-folder Iglesia Presbiteriana. Defensa, Iglesia Presbiteriana_09.

⁸⁵ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, Sub-folder Libro_Subversión_Colombia_44-50.

Second, despite Castillo-Cárdenas's own memories of the 1966 conference, Shaull's theology of revolution can hardly have come as a surprise.⁸⁶ The topic had not only been discussed at the Latin American Committee of Church and Society since 1963 (see footnote 55), but also by 1966 a number of theologians had expressed their concern about it: for instance, the German theologian Heinz-Dietrich Wendland in his 'The Church and Revolution' for the preparatory volume of the Geneva Conference. The Methodist Alan Austin published in 1966 *The Revolutionary Imperative* — which addressed the 'strange odyssey of the Church from the Bible to the picket line'. For V. Grounds, the odyssey was even further, from the seminary lecture hall to the guerrilla hideout.⁸⁷

The impact of Shaull's contributions for the preparatory volume and at the conference with his 'The Revolutionary Challenge to Church and Theology,' one of the two major addresses, should be assessed not only for the topic but also for the object of its criticism. It was the first fundamental criticism of 'the theology of the responsible society' — the theological tenet underlying traditional ecumenical social ethics. In the face of a nuclear threat, the war in Vietnam and the spread of military rule and armed local conflicts and the poverty and suffering of the majority of the world population, according to Shaull, recovering the mission of the Church required concern for the people involved in revolutionary struggles to change existing power structures. The advocacy of a 'theology of revolution', in opposition to 'the theology of the responsible society', became the object of thorough debate as was also clearly reflected in the different stages of the conference: it was brought up at the various theological consultations, such as the report 'The Church for the Others'; it was underlined at the opening speech by the General Secretary of the WCC,

⁸⁶ According to Castillo-Cárdenas, Shaull delivered an 'intriguing' presentation on theology of revolution in the 1966 World Conference, which surprised Fals-Borda. See, footnote 8.

⁸⁷ Grounds, *Revolution and the Christian Faith*, 71.

Visser't Hooft; and it was discussed in depth at the Commission IV (on Person in Community), in which Fals-Borda and Shaull participated.⁸⁸ It was also in the final report written by M. Thomas, Director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society. According to M. Thomas, the uniqueness of the conference was that it had been 'the most serious attempt on the part of the WCC to understand the revolutionary realities which shape the modern world, undertaken with the help of Christians intellectually and emotionally involved in them'.⁸⁹ Therefore, the conference moved from the traditional definition of *koinonia* (communion) as service through pastoral ministry of the Church to a wider one concerned with the groups struggling for political justice, especially in nations threatened by poverty and famine.⁹⁰

A comprehensive analysis of either Fals-Borda's participation or the theological developments of the conference falls outside the scope of this section; however, in order to gain some understanding of the theological roots of Fals-Borda's critique, three main aspects will be noted:

- 1) the wide spectrum of reflections on ideology for political action rooted in Christian ecumenical and ethical principles which, in the case of Fals-Borda, came together in Camilo Torres's utopianism and the theology of liberation (see next section).
- 2) An eschatological interpretation of revolution. At one of his presentations at the conference, Fals-Borda's analysis resembled Camilo Torres's revolutionary agenda:

⁸⁸ 'Christian participation in mission,' M.M. Thomas wrote, 'involves participation in the struggle for a just society — such struggle may necessitate radical changes in the structures of society, if these structures are to become the instruments of justice for all rather than of privilege for the few and oppression of the majority. It is these radical changes which are called revolutions.' M. M. Thomas, 'Issues Concerning the Life and Work of the Church in a Revolutionary World,' *The Ecumenical Review* vol. 20, issue 4 (1968): 412. For Visser't Hooft: 'In a world in which all faiths, all churches, all ideologies, traditional theological concepts and ethical systems are called in question, in which it is loudly proclaimed that God is dead and that man's existence has ultimately no meaning ... one of the tasks of the conference was to raise awareness that nothing less than radical structural changes in international economic relations is required'. W. A. Visser't Hooft, 'World Conference on Church and Society,' *The Ecumenical Review* vol. 18 no. 4 (1966): 417. See also Orlando Fals-Borda's comments Section IV, 3rd session, ref: 243.08/05, and Fals-Borda's interventions at the Section IV. WCCA, Series of the 1966 Conference, 1st plenary minutes, ref: 243.13/01.

⁸⁹ Thomas, 'Issues Concerning,' 410.

⁹⁰ Visser't Hooft, 'World Conference,' 424.

‘To seize power from the oligarchy to give it to the lower class.’⁹¹ The conference instead analysed the state of contemporary revolutions from an innovative eschatological perspective. In contrast to the classical approach, on the one hand it looked at struggles for social justice as historical participation in the renewal of things promised by God.⁹² On the other hand, it served as a deterrent to the corrupting temptation to absolutize revolution as a scheme of salvation: ‘Since the revolution is menaced most by the self-justification, the temptation of false messianism and the fury of self-righteousness ... this eschatological note can help the revolution to avoid utopian illusions and disillusion without neglecting the inspiring strength which lies also in utopian hope.’⁹³ This understanding is clearly the basis for the dialectics of subversion being viewed as a continuous and never-ending struggle between utopia and ideology (Chapter 5).

3) The debate on the nature of revolutionary violence and the open-ended discussion on its strategy — ‘the locus of danger and ambiguity’.⁹⁴ The conference defined that the essence of revolution was a radical change in power structures as the bearer of social justice, and not violence; however, the question about violence as a means of social justice was still an issue of deep concern since even when the strategy of revolution is non-violent, violence is always potentially present. This, in turn, left open the question of the strategy of revolution and consequently of the legitimacy and legality of the means and techniques of political struggle. The conference underlined the need to

⁹¹ Fals-Borda defined the dilemma of developing countries in the following terms: ‘Shall the masses accept the process of palliatives and minor changes postulated by international policies such as the Alliance for Progress, or shall they embrace true socioeconomic development through revolutionary violent uprisings insofar as traditional elites are against changes that might affect their vested interests?’ As he concluded: ‘There is little question, nevertheless, that those traditional, parasitic elites that are rooted like a swamp jungle in the sloughs of underdevelopment, must be supplanted by new ones with clearer consciousness of their mission of service.’ Fals-Borda, 1966, Comments for discussion on nationalistic and political movements in the world. WCCA, Series of the 1966 Conference, ref: 243/13/01, description: Orlando Fals-Borda’s comments Section IV on 14 July 1966 (written on paper of Hotel Continental), 3. See also Torres Camilo, ‘Join the Workers,’ in *Revolutionary Priest*, 384.

⁹² Eschatology (from Greek *eskhaton*, ‘last’, ‘utmost’, in Medieval theology related to ‘life after life’ of the climax of history (death, judgment, heaven, hell)).

⁹³ Minutes of discussion section IV, sub-section 1, on 19 July 1966, World Conference on Church and Society, WCC. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Congresos_Asociaciones, Sub-folder Congreso_Mundial_Iglesias_63-65.

⁹⁴ World Conference on Church and Society, *Official Report*, 98.

search for new methods of interaction consistent with Christian notions of social ethics and relevant to concrete situations of struggle.⁹⁵

If Shaull's notion of subversion afforded Fals-Borda a core topic for historical research, the conference in general provided him with a Christian ecumenical framework in which faith and revolutionary ideologies were connected through a new humanism which sought 'to make [revolutions] more realistic and human, through bringing them under the criterion and power of the New Humanity in Christ'.⁹⁶ Fals-Borda's participation in the conference prepared him to enter into another field of theological debate — Liberation Theology — whose ideologues spearheaded the struggle for social justice in Latin America.

4. Liberation Theology: An option for the poor

In his 'Unfinished Revolutions in America Latina' (1968), Fals-Borda considered the deaths of both Camilo Torres (February 1966) and Ernesto Guevara (November 1967) to represent the climax of a type of revolutionary endeavour in Latin America.

'Now follows the anti-climax of tedious examination, and careful reorganization ...

New heroes, new utopias, new directives toward dissent will very likely appear because the basic problems of Latin American society persist and invite rebellious thought and

⁹⁵ According to the Zagorsk Theological Consultation social ethics is the result of the 'method of dialectical interaction between justice to the *humanum* which provides a more or less dynamic framework of principles relating power, justice and love, and relevance to the concrete situation.' Thomas, 'Issues Concerning,' 415. To what extent this approach can be seen as one of the seminal elements underlying the origins of PAR, it is difficult to precise; however, there are various elements of convergence between them as will be discussed further in the next section.

⁹⁶ Thomas, 'Issues Concerning,' 414.

action.’⁹⁷ He did not have to wait long to see the emergence of another cycle of the struggle driven, this time, by a new theological paradigm.

When Fals-Borda first presented his idea of a ‘Commitment Sociology’ to his audience at the VII Latin American Conference of Sociology, Bogota, 1967, the notion of commitment had become a crucial element of the praxis of Catholic and Protestant theologians in Latin America: ‘as reflection, theology is “second act”; the first act is commitment to the poor.’⁹⁸

In Liberation Theology there was a convergence of both theology and social science on the one hand and Protestants and Catholics, on the other. Through social analysis and theological reflection, and based on their own experience, these theologians interpreted the meaning of Christian life through their solidarity with the oppressed and their determination to abolish the unjust situation. This confluence of principles was the new ground for ecumenism, not limited to marginal groups but also expressed in the highest circles of the hierarchy. As Rubem Alves, Head of the Union Theological Seminary and new Director of Studies of the Latin American Committee of Church and Society — after Shaull — put it: ‘Groups with utopian views within Protestantism have discovered a new unity with groups holding identical views in the Catholic Church. A new

⁹⁷ Originally written as a paper and presented at the Institute of Latin American Studies London University (1968) (see footnote 67). Fals-Borda, ‘Unfinished Revolutions in Latin America.’ In ‘Marginality and Revolution in Latin America: 1809–1969,’ *Studies in Comparative International Development, United Nations*, vol. 6, issue 4 (1970/1971), 77.

⁹⁸ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xxiii. In Fals-Borda’s words: ‘Este es, precisamente, el reto científico del momento: llegar a demostrar que comprometiéndose activamente con el esfuerzo nacional revolucionario también se puede hacer ciencia, y ciencia respetable a nivel universal. El diseñar nuevos marcos conceptuales basados en nuestras realidades conflictivas, si apoyo en muletas ideológicas foráneas, respondería a la necesidad de servirle al país, y al mismo tiempo enriquecería la ciencia social. Fals-Borda, *Ciencia Propia y Colonialismo Intelectual* (México: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1970), 91.

ecclesiological reality is coming into being which is ecumenical and absolutely authentic, although it does not bear the “official” label.’⁹⁹

Amidst this new ecumenical atmosphere, an interesting step in Fals-Borda’s intellectual journey took place: his search for a new method of research and political participation converged with a number of core elements of the emerging theology of liberation. It is not possible at this point to introduce them all; however, for the purpose of this chapter, this section will consider two aspects of Fals-Borda’s praxis which moved in parallel with the theology of liberation: the ideology for action, and the search for a method of popular participation; aspects analysed in more depth in chapters 5 and 6.

4.1. An ideology for action

In relation to previous criticism of the Catholic Church, Liberation Theology represented a significant shift. Not only was it a critique from inside but, in contrast to the liberal criticism which denounced the Church’s contradictions between its spiritual mission and its overwhelmingly institutional bearing in worldly affairs, Liberation Theology focused its criticism on the very core of Christendom: the promise of an eternal life, accompanied by a mix of superstitions and rites which allows the

⁹⁹ Rubem Alvez, ‘Protestantism in Latin America: its ideological function and utopian possibilities,’ *The Ecumenical Review* vol. XXII, no.1 (1970): 14. In 1971, Alvez put forward his views on the new theological challenges for Protestantism in Latin America in a project on ecumenism sent to John Sinclair, General Secretary of the Commission of Ecumenical Mission and Relations (COEMAR). As justification of his project, Alvez wrote: ‘The future of Latin America depends on the future of the Roman Catholic Church. As opposed to Protestantism, which was a cultural transplant and is today nothing more than one religion among others, Roman Catholicism is part of the Latin American soul. It is at the very roots of our culture and right inside the emotional matrix of its life. Protestants, therefore, can no longer ask the question: how to convert Catholics? If our primordial concern is the future of Latin America we must rather ask: How is it that we can function as the midwives who will help the Catholic Church to give birth to the new future that she alone is engendering inside her womb? Is it possible to bring Protestant thought and ethos to bear upon that Church, so as to fertilize her?’ Letter to John Sinclair, the Commission of Ecumenical Mission and Relations (COEMAR) of United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, New York, on 25 October 1971. PHS, UPC-USA, Commission on Ecumenical Missions and Relations Secretaries’ files: Colombia Mission, 1882–1972 (bulk: 1911–1970), Folder Sinclair, John Henderson, Central Files, Miscellaneous_ 43.

ecclesiastical institution to disregard of the fate of the faithful in this world. Taken aback by such a radical shift embodied in the theology of liberation, the theologian P. Berryman asked: 'How could a theology of liberation arise from a Church so historically conservative?'¹⁰⁰ He found his answer in the socio-economic crisis of Latin American countries in the early 1960s and the impact of Vatican Council II, 1962–1965.

The tradition from which Liberation Theology sprang goes much further back than the crisis of the early 1960s. It comes from what Shaull called 'the traditional humanism of the Iberian soul' (see Thesis Introduction), which arose in Latin America as a contrast to the spirit of the conquistadors.¹⁰¹ Alongside the recovery of the narratives of salvation in the Old and New Testaments, a critical reading of the history of evangelisation in Latin America gave rise to a theology fully aware of the struggle of the poor.¹⁰²

For Fals-Borda, the 'social experiments of Dominicans and Jesuits, Las Casas and Vasco de Quiroga, even though unsuccessful in the end, showed the calibre and decisiveness of the ideological commitment of the times'.¹⁰³ The testimony *par excellence* of such struggle to defend the native population was Fray Antonio de Montesinos's sermon on the Sunday before Christmas 1511 in Hispaniola (now Haiti/Dominican Republic).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 12.

¹⁰¹ See general Introduction and Chapter 1, section 3.2.

¹⁰² 'Theology as critical reflection on historical praxis is a liberating theology ... a theology which is open—in the protest against trampled human dignity, in the struggle against plunder of the vast majority of humankind—to the gift of the Kingdom of God.' Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 12; 86–88.

¹⁰³ Fals-Borda, *Unfinished Revolutions*, 77.

¹⁰⁴ This sermon was a deliberate rebuke to the first governor of Hispaniola, Diego Columbus, and perhaps it was the first public protest against the treatment of the Indians by the Spanish conquistadors: 'I am the voice of Christ in the desert of this island. It would be wise of you to pay attention and to listen with your whole heart and with every fabric of your being... You are all in mortal sin. You live in it; you die in it. All because of the cruel tyranny you exercise against these innocent peoples. Tell me, *by what right and with what justice* do you so violently enslave these Indians? By what authority do you wage such hideous wars against these people who peacefully inhabit their lands, killing them by unspeakable means? How can you oppress them giving neither food nor medicine and by working them to death all for your insatiable thirst for gold? And what care are you providing them spiritually in teaching them about their God and creator, so they are baptized, hear mass, and keep holy days? Are they not human beings? Do they not have rational souls? Are you not obligated to love them as you love yourselves? Do you not understand or feel this? Be certain that, state as this, you can no more be saved than the Moors or Turks.'

For more than four centuries, utopian humanism had remained limited to individual and small-group initiatives and efforts. In the early 1970s, however, a number of theologians, bishops, priests, sisters and laymen became the key intellectuals and advisors of grassroots movements and small communities. As Fals-Borda observed, in the light of ideological exhaustion reached by traditional parties on the one hand and the rigid dogmatism among the leftist factions on the other, the theological interpretation of the socio-economic context proved to be an historical awakening.¹⁰⁵ In fact, an interpretation of Christian faith arising out of the suffering, struggle and hope of the poor became in itself a form of ideological struggle: first, as a criticism of the socio-political structures sustaining social injustice; and second, it unmasked the manipulation of Christian values and teaching, within the ideological framework of the Cold War, to justify capitalism.¹⁰⁶

A decisive influence at this time was the first systematisation of Liberation Theology in 1969 by the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutiérrez, a classmate (in sociology) of Camilo Torres at Louvain. Gutiérrez, who participated in Vatican Council II, 1962–1965, was the key ideologue of the Medellin Conference of Bishops.¹⁰⁷ As a member of the Centre Bartolome de las Casas and lecturer in Marxism and Christianity at the Catholic University of Lima, Gutiérrez led theological investigations closely linked to social analysis and practice. As dweller himself of a Lima slum, Gutiérrez claimed that

Quoted in A Bradstock and C. Rowland, ed., *Radical Christian Writings* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 62-63.

¹⁰⁵ Fals-Borda '¿Es Posible una Sociología de la Liberación?' in *Ciencia Propia y Colonialismo Intelectual* (México: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1970), 23-24.

¹⁰⁶ Equally, Fals-Borda pointed out, 'Latin American armies have been guided ideologically and technically in their fight against subversion by the United States Department of Defence and have formed a powerful body, the Inter-American Defence Council to integrate their action. Credit has been given to this institution for crushing the Guatemalan Revolution, the Dominican leftists, and the Peruvian and Colombian guerrillas as well.' Fals-Borda, *Unfinished Revolutions*, 77. See Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 136; Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 3; 28.

¹⁰⁷ John W. Hart, 'Topia and Utopia in Colombia and Peru: The Theory and the Practice of Camilo Torres and Gustavo Gutiérrez in their Historical Contexts,' (PhD thesis, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1978), 196.

denying the existence of the class struggle ‘is really to put oneself on the side of the dominant sectors. Neutrality is impossible’.¹⁰⁸ The key questions were: ‘For whose benefit?’ ‘In whose interest is it to make such and such a claim about God?’¹⁰⁹

Whilst Fals-Borda was still in Geneva (one month before the 1969 Conference of Sociology in Mexico; see Chapter 6), Gutiérrez presented his ‘Notes on a Theology of Liberation’ at the Consultation of Theology and Development organised by SODEPAX in November 1969, in Cartigny, Switzerland.¹¹⁰ The U.S. publication *Time* magazine reviewed it as ‘the moment’s most influential text’.¹¹¹ Contrary to traditional theology, whose function was to defend the Roman Catholic system, Gutiérrez raised new questions that were warmly welcomed in progressive theological circles. Moving away from abstract principles, Gutiérrez underlined that his theological perspective was ‘explicable only when seen in close conjunction with the life and commitments of Christian communities. This connection is the basis for the familiar distinction between the two phases of theological work: Christian life (praxis) and reflection in the strict sense (critique)’.¹¹²

The association of the love of Christ with the struggle of the poor, led the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of the Holy See to accuse liberation theologians of ‘infecting the Church with Marxist ideology under the guise of theology’.¹¹³ For the traditional hierarchy, Communism was a religious-atheistic issue with which, in fact, Liberation Theology was not engaged. The use of Marxism was the method of the critique of society; and in ideological terms Liberation Theology was rooted in

¹⁰⁸ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 158.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Kirwan, *Political Theology, A New Introduction* (Norwick: Darton-Longman Todd, 2008), 8.

¹¹⁰ Based on the paper presented at the *Encuentro Nacional del Movimiento Sacerdotal* (ONIS), Chimbote, Perú, July 1968. The year after, Gutiérrez Gustavo published his *Hacia una Teología de la Liberación* (Montevideo: Servicio Cristiano de Documentación, 1969).

¹¹¹ See Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, back cover.

¹¹² Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xxviii.

¹¹³ Quoted in Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 81.

indigenous socialism ‘not to satisfy a desire for originality,’ as Gutiérrez put it, ‘but for the sake of elementary historical realism’.¹¹⁴ Thus, the ideological symbol of Liberation Theology was not ‘the revolutionary’ (the Catholic churchmen committed to violent revolution were a small, though significant, minority¹¹⁵) but ‘the prophet’ and ‘the martyr’ such as Montesinos in 1511 and Bishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, who was assassinated whilst celebrating mass after demanding that his country's military forces stop the repression in 1980.¹¹⁶

4.2. The methodological question: from intervention to militant research

In July 1969, in a letter to a group of scholars in Colombia sounding out options for a centre of social research (see Chapter 6), Fals-Borda asked them whether they should focus their efforts on revitalising the Camilo Torres Foundation rather than creating a new one. As he wrote: ‘Queda también la posibilidad de dedicar nuestras energías a la fundación Camilo Torres, lo que, en las presentes circunstancias, significa entrar allí de lleno para darle vida y ponerla a trabajar. Ustedes saben que actualmente los que están más cerca de ella son los del grupo Golconda (Padre René García y Germán Zabala). Ustedes estarían de acuerdo con ello?’¹¹⁷ This option of joining *Golconda* came after Fals-Borda met René García in Geneva in a meeting at the WCC.

¹¹⁴ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 66.

¹¹⁵ In the early 1960s, ‘in Sao Paolo Dominican monks work with urban guerrillas. In Montevideo a priest heads an underground revolutionary network. In Bolivia fifty Catholic clergyman openly espouse armed rebellion. In Lima a priest co-directs the National Liberation Front. ... Priest fought the military “gorillas” in Argentina, the Somoza bullies in Nicaragua, the Stroessner-U.S. Aid Mission in Paraguay.’ John Gerassi, ed., *Revolutionary Priest*, 3; 14.

¹¹⁶ At the crowded cathedral in San Salvador on 23 March 1980, Romero ended his homily asking the members of the army and the security forces to stop the repression: ‘My brothers, you are part of our very own people. You are killing your own fellow peasants. God’s law, ‘Thou shalt not kill’ takes precedence over human being’s order to kill. No soldier is obliged to obey an order that is against God’s law. No one has to obey an immoral law.’ Two days later Romero was assassinated. Quoted in Berryman, 2.

¹¹⁷ Letter (labelled as confidential) from Geneva on 27 July 1970. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Investigación Acción Participativa, Sub-folder Fundación Rosca. Rosca de Investigación y Acción social_10.

The *Golconda* group developed out of a meeting of fifty priests which was held at an estate called Golconda in July 1968. The group was inspired by Camilo Torres and his involvement in the political solution to social problems. The ‘Camilo Torres process’, as Fals-Borda called it, had questioned at least two indisputable principles of the Colombian Catholic Church: absolute obedience to the hierarchy and the assertion that the church must not be involved in politics ‘unless the hierarchy judges that a particular system of government is a threat to its human–divine structure’.¹¹⁸

In December 1968, the group, led by a bishop, issued the Golconda Declaration after the conference of the Latin American bishops in Medellín. This declaration echoed the Medellín Conference’s conclusions regarding the socio-political and ecclesiastical crisis in the Latin America region and tried to put it into the Colombian context.¹¹⁹ Both the Medellín Conference’s opening ceremony and the XXXIX International Eucharistic Congress in Bogotá were presided over by Pope Paul VI. The first visit of a pope to a Latin American country had been preceded by a series of local assemblies in preparation for the Eucharistic congress, and these had proved to be a propitious opportunity to establish base communities (*Comunidades de base*). Despite Golconda’s rapid loss of momentum, the impact of the ‘revolution of the cassocks’, as a Liberal newspaper called it, reverberated throughout the country and its influence lasted in the work of these small communities.¹²⁰ Under the guidance of René García, a priest, and

¹¹⁸ Germán Guzmán, *Camilo Torres, el cura guerrillero* (Bogotá: Ediciones Especiales de la Prensa, 1967), 151.

¹¹⁹ The Colombian bishops, who had been very dissatisfied with the final document of the Medellín Conference, rejected Golconda’s attempt to legitimise their political involvement on the basis of the Medellín Conference. In fact, the Colombian hierarchy ‘regarded as the most conservative in Latin America, published their own report the day before the Medellín documents were formally voted upon. [They] rejected the “negative picture” of a frustrated continent embroiled in pre-revolutionary turmoil. Not only did they not recognise a state of conflict, they did not grant the existence of opposed social classes.’ Richard Harries Funk, ‘Camilo Torres Restrepo and the Christian Left in the Tradition of Colombian Church-State Relations,’ (PhD thesis, University of Notre Dame, 1972), 85.

¹²⁰ A significant number of members drifted away after the declaration; however, the Golconda group remained very active politically; among its tasks it revived Camilo Torres’s newspaper, *Frente Unido*, whose editor was Germán Guzmán, co-author of *La Violencia en Colombia* (1962; 1963). The newspaper circulated monthly.

Germán Zabala, a staunch Marxist, both close friends of Camilo Torres, Golconda had advocated a revolutionary theology; that is, a Christian theology needing a method of social analysis. That methodology was given by Marxism.¹²¹ The fact that Fals-Borda considered establishing his centre of social research in partnership with the Golconda's leaders should not pass unnoticed. This idea of reorganising Camilo Torres's movement, stated in his Memorandum to Cuba, clearly reflected his ideological convictions, as will be seen in the next chapter.

Fals-Borda did not join Golconda. The radicalisation of some of its members, to the point that one of them joined the ELN guerrilla group, critically divided the group. Subsequently most of its members scattered.¹²² This however did not prevent Fals-Borda from analysing the convergence between Committed Sociology and Liberation Theology. The eight articles that made up his book *Ciencia Propia y Colonialismo Intelectual* (1970) examined from different angles the implications of a sociology concerning the struggle of the poor. As Fals-Borda put it: 'Uno de los campos nuevos para la sociología es el de la liberación, es decir, la utilización del método científico para describir, analizar y aplicar el conocimiento para transformar la sociedad, trastocar la estructura de poder y de clases que condiciona esa transformación.'¹²³ The book aimed to validate the analysis of the ongoing process of liberation and to show that it should be a main concern of the social sciences in Latin America.

This two-way exchange of ideas between social sciences and theology was not only theoretical. The creation of base communities demanded methods and techniques of

¹²¹ Funk, 'Camilo Torres Restrepo and the Christian Left,' 73.

¹²² In 1969, three leaders of the Golconda group were suspended from their ministry, and a few others involved in public demonstrations arrested. The Spanish priest, Domingo Laín, after being deported returned clandestinely to Colombia and joined in 15 February 1970 (on the fourth anniversary of Camilo Torres' death) the guerrillas of ELN in which Camilo Torres fought. Zeitlin Maurice, prologue to *Revolutionary Writings* by Camilo Torres (New York: Harper, 1969), 45-46.

¹²³ Fals-Borda '¿Es Posible una Sociología de la Liberación?' in *Ciencia Propia y Colonialismo Intelectual* (México: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1970), 23.

participation and novel organisation. In contrast with the traditional pastoral approach (focused on the cult, indoctrination or charitable work), base communities started by teaching people to read and write; creating communal organisation and helping them understand the conditions under which they lived. Paulo Freire called it, *conscientization*.¹²⁴ Some aspects of Action-Research and Liberation Theology's hermeneutics circle (action–reflection–action) developed in parallel during this initial process of cross-fertilisation. At this stage, three aspects will be considered:

1) A criticism of the theology of revolution. As Rubem Alvez warned, Christians might avoid 'the naïve identification of revolution with liberation'.¹²⁵ According to Gustavo Gutiérrez such identification took place in Shaul's 'theology of revolution'. For Gutiérrez, theology of liberation cannot be reduced to political liberation, which does not mean that it separates itself from the struggle for social justice.¹²⁶ Liberation theologians were intellectuals whose connection with the grass-roots movements was different from that of most academic theologians. As pastoral workers they were able to cross cultural and class lines. Their readers and critics, however, were theologians in Europe and North America and their colleagues in Latin America. Thus, the meaning of liberation was not given by their commitment to revolution but by their making theology *from, for and of* praxis.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, 1970, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1996), 12-15.

¹²⁵ Rubem Alvez *Tomorrow's Child: Imagination, Creativity and the Rebirth of Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 184.

¹²⁶ 'The theology of liberation,' wrote Gutiérrez, 'does not intend to Christianly justify postures already taken, it does not intend to be a revolutionary Christian ideology. It is a reflection starting from human historical praxis. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Praxis de Liberación y Fe Cristiana* (Lima: Centro de Documentación de MIEC-JECI, 1973), 19-20. For further analysis: Gustavo Gutiérrez and Richard Shaull *Liberation and Change*, ed. Stone Ronald (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977); Waldo Cesar 'Church and Society —or Society and Church?' in *Revolution of Spirit: Essays in Honor of Richard Shaull*, ed., Nantawan Boonprasat (Michigan: W. B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

¹²⁷ Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 82.

2) Closely connected with the previous point, the critical analysis of ‘commitment’ sought to curb the facile enthusiasm which had led many to interpret the connections between *liberation*, *commitment* and *social science* superficially and hence identified the struggle simply as a form of *intervention* and *agitation* of the masses.¹²⁸ Techniques associated with Committed Sociology such as ‘observation by participation’ and ‘observation by experimentation’ proved to be inadequate for the aims of liberation. Although they were methods of commitment, they were also widely used to manipulate the masses in order to benefit certain political or religious groups.¹²⁹ In contrast to these forms of ‘intervention’, Fals-Borda acknowledged that from 1969 the concept of ‘insertion’ (*inserción*) emerged from activist theologians and pastors — within their revolutionary or pre-revolutionary commitment — providing a clearer methodological framework.¹³⁰ For Gustavo Gutiérrez, who lived with the destitute, ‘insertion’ was the first and most basic stage of praxis as theological method.

3) The activist or intellectual embedded in these key groups is more likely to practise ‘self-investigation’. If insertion is to be the means to foster the historical and social process of change in a class society, the traditional distinction between ‘observers of the process’ and ‘people observed’ must change: action-research means that both parties must be active and willing to participate in the research task.¹³¹ Understood in this way, the method must be both an intellectual experiment of analysis and also be adaptable according to real circumstances. ‘These factors,’ said Fals-Borda, ‘constitute the basic

¹²⁸ Fals-Borda, ‘The Social Sciences and the Struggle for Liberation,’ *The Ecumenical Review* vol. 26, issue 1 (1974): 63-64; see also ‘La Crisis como Concepto integrante de la Liberación,’ in *Ciencia Propia y Colonialismo Intelectual*, 37-38.

¹²⁹ ‘The most important instance of this presence in our times, especially in underdeveloped and oppressed countries, is the struggle to construct a just and fraternal society, where persons can live with dignity and be the agents of their own destiny.’ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xiv.

¹³⁰ Through immersion it is possible to reach ‘a complete internal view of the situation and processes studied, with a view to present and future action.’ Fals-Borda, *The Social Sciences and the Struggle for Liberation*, 62.

¹³¹ Fals-Borda, ‘¿Es Posible una Sociología de la Liberación?’, 25.

technique of *militant investigation*, as an effective means of insertion.’¹³² Using similar terms, this is what the 1966 WCC World Conference had tentatively defined as a ‘method of dialectical interaction’.¹³³

As will be seen in Chapter 6, *militant investigation* was an important moment in Fals-Borda’s search for a method of social research and political participation. Theoretical and practical elements of this type of research were evaluated or abandoned later on; however, among those elements which remained consistent and crucial was ‘critical recovery’ of history. From the perspective of Liberation Theology, critical recovery meant not only the understanding of past circumstances that led to a present situation but also the re-discovery of other struggles, i.e. those of the Old and New Testaments as seen from the perspective of liberation. In stark contrast to the Christ of Tangiers — the Christ of colonial times — Liberation Theology re-discovered the praxis of Jesus and the prophets whose words and deeds no longer served or justify the vested interests of the groups in power.

With the benefit of hindsight

Fals-Borda was excommunicated from the Presbyterian Church of Colombia in 1972. To what extent the conflict with the church affected Fals-Borda’s subsequent religious and theological stances is a topic that deserves thorough analysis in future research. As will be indicated in the closing chapter, during the years he joined the peasant movement, 1971–1975, Fals-Borda was radically at odds with the Presbyterian Synod of Colombia. Nevertheless, he remained a member of the Latin American Committee on Church and Society, of the Commission on the Churches Participation in

¹³² Fals-Borda, ‘The Social Sciences and the Struggle for Liberation,’ 65; ‘Reflexiones sobre la aplicación del método de Estudio-Acción en Colombia.’ *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, vol. 35, no. 1 (1973): 51.

¹³³ See footnote 95 above.

Development (CCPD), the Programme Unit on Justice and Service, and the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the WCC and SODEPAX.¹³⁴ All these commissions and institutions were critically concerned with social justice, cooperation and solidarity and struggles for liberation — key topics also discussed at the General Committee of the CCIA (Zurich 1970) and the WCC 4th and 5th Assemblies (Uppsala 1968 and Nairobi 1975). The conflict with the Synod did force Fals-Borda's resignation as a member of the Committee on the Self-Development of People, United Presbyterian Church of the U.S. However, he was invited as guest to the General Assembly in Denver, Colorado, 1972. In the invitation letter, Bryant George wrote to Fals-Borda: 'We feel that your presence as a former member of the committee and as an outstanding sociologist and Christian would be extremely valuable for us.'¹³⁵

To conclude this chapter, it is worth underlining another dimension, more intimate, of Fals-Borda's relationship with his religious experience. The introduction started with the assertion that the musical element in Fals-Borda was far from being an inconsequential part of his life. Music was the element that he most associated with his religious personal experience. According to Fals-Borda, his love for music, in particular choral music, formed his personal ecumenical attitude as much as his professional approach as sociologist. The homage that both the Presbyterian Church of Barranquilla (2002) and the National University (2003) paid to Fals-Borda by playing his music were interpreted by Fals-Borda himself not only as acts of reconciliation but also as a recognition of what he called 'his second nature': 'Es mucho, pues, lo que mi

¹³⁴ References: ISA Research Committee, Circular 6 July 1973. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Congresos_Asociaciones_ISA_Research committee_008-009. Letters from and to Charles Harper, WCC, 1976. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Congresos_Asociaciones, Sub-folder Congreso_Mundial_Iglesias_78-80; SODEPAX and CCPD. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Congresos_Asociaciones, Sub-folder Congreso_Mundial_Iglesias_368; CCPD Latin American Network Meeting, San Jose, Costa Rica, 10–13 December 1976. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Congresos_Asociaciones, Sub-folder Congreso_Mundial_Iglesias_181; 355.

¹³⁵ Letter on 17 April 1972. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Investigación Acción Participativa, Sub-folder Fundación Rosca. Rosca de Investigación y Acción social_117.

musicalidad debe a la Iglesia, en lo que puede ser una segunda dimensión de mi persona, tanto o más satisfactoria que la científica; en realidad pienso que la una me ha ayudado con la otra, si analizamos las estructuras multivocales de algunas de mis obras.’¹³⁶

Although Fals-Borda referred in particular to his *Historia Doble de la Costa*, music had played a significant role since his early sociological career. In the town of Vianí, place of his first short post, music was the means to establish contact with the people and to bridge the gap between him and culturally different groups. As stated in Chapter 1, his volunteering in the church as organist was one issue that led his boss to fire him. Fals-Borda’s musical sensibility made him aware that music was one of the few elements that had connected the rural world with other cultural contexts. Cultural and linguistic elements had made their way to isolated regions of Cundinamarca and Boyacá through the peasants’ fondness for Colombian Caribbean music (*porros*, *cumbias*, *paseo*) and Mexican *corridos* and *rancheras*. His study of the peasant community of Saucío dedicated one section of discerning analysis to the history, evolution, features and meaning of music for this community.¹³⁷ Nor was this aspect neglected in LVC (1962, 1963). As he observed: ‘El pueblo no dejó de cantar ni en las adversas y calamitosas condiciones de los grupos errantes.’ New lyrics using the rhythm of popular songs exploited and enhanced individual and collective feelings, ideas and hatreds of groups engaged in the conflict. Some ditties and songs, testimonies of *la Violencia*, became popular with the peasantry.¹³⁸ In Fals-Borda’s *Historia Doble de la Costa*, music was a core element — this study of the Colombian Caribbean resembles, as was Fals-Borda’s purpose, a true polyphony.¹³⁹ Fals-Borda’s ecumenism was not only a form of criticism

¹³⁶ Fals-Borda, *Antología* (Bogotá: CLACSO, Siglo del Hombre Editores, 2009), 26.

¹³⁷ Fals-Borda, *Peasant Society*, 179-185.

¹³⁸ Guzmán et al., LVC, 236-244.

¹³⁹ ‘Allí el lector podrá oír leyendo en contrapunto y armonía las voces y letanías del pueblo y el cántico de sus dirigentes mezclado en diversas formas de estilo y de representación, incluso visual, que no puedo

of the dogmatisms and fanaticisms that drove *la Violencia* and the subsequent political violence in Colombia. It also led his critique to the threshold of its aesthetic and celebrative dimension.

explicar sino como el inconsciente seguir de mi viejo amor por la música coral, y también por las iglesias donde aprendí por primera vez los secretos de la composición y de la interpretación.' Fals-Borda, 'Memo sobre la Música Sociológica,' (16 January 2002). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Iglesia_Presbiteriana_ Música_Coral_23.

Chapter Five

Moral Subversion:

The Socio-Historical Framework of Fals-Borda's Political Ideology

In 1967, Fals-Borda brought his academic credentials and his ideological convictions together in his highly controversial *Subversion and Social Change in Colombia* (*Subversion*).¹ This was Fals-Borda's first attempt, in Benjamin's words, 'to brush history against the grain.'² However, his aim was not to dispute 'the truth of the past' with the orthodox historians of the traditional political parties. In reality, Fals-Borda was struggling to transform a fossilised national historiography into a field of discursive exchange, and for the right to be critical of tradition, especially if this tradition justified exclusion and inequality of large parts of the population.

Prior to the creation of the *Nueva Historia* school and the *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura*, both promoted by the historian Jaime Jaramillo Uribe in 1963, most historians were erudite and prominent citizens associated with the Colombian Academy of History. 'They,' as Henderson pointed out, 'avoided writing about subjects either controversial or recent, preferring instead to treat themes from either the independence or colonial periods. They did so in large part because as militants in either the Liberal or Conservative parties they feared the political consequences of dealing with sensitive topics.'³ Only when a new generation of

¹ Quotations and references are taken from the English edition 1969. Otherwise, the year will be indicated.

² Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Concept of History, Thesis, VII' in vol. 4 of *Selected Writings 1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), 391.

³ James Henderson, *Modernization in Colombia. The Laureano Gómez Years, 1889–1965* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 410.

professional historians emerged, did historical writing free itself from partisan commitment. As Jaramillo Agudelo recalled: ‘Colombian historical writing merited its reputation as a kind of distilled extract exclusively dedicated to torturing the memory and simultaneously deadening the critical sense and imagination of students.’⁴

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Fals-Borda became the leading light of this new approach. He was recognised for both his knowledge of and commitment to rural communities and for his impeccable scholarship, a combination which was a challenge to those erudite politicians who devoted their intellectual capital to justifying the National Front. By breaking out of the chronological straightjacket into which partisan historians had constricted narration of the past, Fals-Borda examined national narratives critically with the aim of preventing the memory of collective struggles from sinking into oblivion. As he described it himself, *Subversion* was a book with its feet on the ground of history and its eyes fixed on alternatives for a better society than that bequeathed to his generation. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Fals-Borda’s *Subversion* (1967) was not an isolated effort — the fact that the book was re-edited and published in 1968, one year after its first edition, and then translated and published in English in 1969 shows the extent to which the topic mattered to Fals-Borda and many others.

According to Fals-Borda, the challenge posed by this dialectic between past and present was not to achieve a synthesis in philosophical terms but consisted of ‘achieving the valued goals that have been set by certain leaders in conjunction with the people themselves since 1925, [a task] not completed yet’.⁵ If Fals-Borda’s historical dialectic between utopia and subversion was revolutionary in its time, it was because it struggled to define a not-yet-encountered and, in principle, unimaginable social order.

⁴ Jaramillo Agudelo, ed., *Nueva Historia de Colombia* (Bogotá: Colcultura, 1976), 8.

⁵ Fals-Borda, *Subversion and Social Change in Colombia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), xii.

The actualisation of a utopian image within the framework of scholarly sociological wisdom is what deserves most attention in this chapter. Accordingly, it analyses Fals-Borda's socio-historical research on subversion not only as it was presented in his book *Subversion*, but as one of the key topics of his critical thinking between 1967 and 1970, such as the five articles that made up *Unfinished Revolutions in America Latina* (1968) and *Subversion and Development* (1969; 1970).

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first one presents a brief account of the socio-political context of the late 1960s, underlining the role and challenges of 'La Generación de la Violencia'. The second part, divided into three sections, analyses the theoretical and methodological basis of Fals-Borda's notion of subversion. It also examines the criticism of his *Subversion* (1967, 1968, 1969). The third part of this chapter, divided into three sections too, focuses on Fals-Borda's shift from non-conformism to a more radical criticism of the status quo. The first of these sections introduces Fals-Borda's Memorandum. Written for the Embassy of Cuba in Geneva as part of the documentation submitted to apply for a visa to visit the island, this Memorandum was a declaration of principles and hence the ideological synthesis after his research on subversion. The second section analyses the key element underlying Fals-Borda's Memorandum: that is, Camilo Torres's pluralism. As mentioned in the previous chapter, despite their deep friendship, Fals-Borda focused on Camilo Torres' utopian elements, leaving the portrait of the man to Camilo Torres's biographers.⁶

This second section approaches Camilo Torres's pluralism as grasped by Fals-Borda's

⁶ By the co-author of LVC, Germán Guzmán, *Camilo Torres, el cura guerrillero* (1967) and *Camilo Torres, presencia y destino* (1967); Norberto Habegger, *Camilo Torres, el cura guerrillero* (1967). In the early 1970s a new biography appeared questioning whether Torres was really dead. Olga de Caycedo, *El Padre Camilo Torres o la crisis de la madurez de América* (1972). The most renowned study so far is Walter Broderick's *Camilo Torres, Biography of the Priest-Guerillero* (1975). More recently, Orlando Villanueva Martínez, *Camilo, acción y utopía* (1995). In 2016, for the 50th anniversary of Camilo Torres's death, it was translated and published in Spanish. Hildegard Lüning, *Sacerdocio y Política* (2016). Originally published in German in 1969.

writing on subversion. The third section looks at Fals-Borda's non-ideological justification of violence, which is in turn his criticism of Camilo Torres's justification of violence. (How the ideas introduced in this Memorandum were put into practice is the topic of Chapter 6). The chapter closes with a short conclusion.

The chapter is based on four main sources of primary information: 1) Fals-Borda's published books, papers and interviews closely related to the topics developed in his *Subversion*, during the late 1960s; 2) Fals-Borda's personal notes, correspondence with friends and colleagues and unpublished papers from his personal archive (Fondo Orlando Fals-Borda); 3) documents and letters from the Archive of the Faculty of Sociology with regard to both Fals-Borda's resignation as Dean and his role as professor and researcher during the academic year 1967; 4) Camilo Torres's letters to and from Torres's brother Fernando.

Fals-Borda's highest expression of historical dialectic analysis was his four-volume *Historia Doble de la Costa*, 1979–1986, as will be discussed in the closing chapter. An analysis of *Historia Doble*, from the perspective of a critique of ideology of political violence, it is beyond doubt a fertile field for future research. This chapter focuses on the foundations upon which Fals-Borda built his subsequent dialectical approach to local and regional history.

1. 'La Generación de la Violencia' and the crisis of the National Front

In the closing paragraph of Chapter 3 it was stated that Fals-Borda's analysis of *la Violencia* was undertaken with academic and social aims, and was also his personal objective: he was in pursuit of the historical dignity of his generation. After the second presidential period of the National Front, 1962–1966, Fals-Borda and other members

of his generation were convinced that this aim was at odds with the National Front's political monopoly. In the light of the establishment's lack of continued legitimacy or popular support, a large number of representative members of 'the generation of *la Violencia*,' found their *raison d'être* to be somewhat revolutionary. The following two sections will discuss the political meaning of both Fals-Borda's generation and the pursuit of their historical dignity, respectively.

1.1. 'La Generación de *la Violencia*'

While the two traditional political parties had brushed aside their ideological differences to set up the power-sharing agreement, the universities, which were no longer the privilege of a minority, became the focus of ideological struggle and often of high levels of radicalisation. Moreover, students had grown in both political awareness and also in number.⁷ Thus, in spite of the National University having played a key role in the overthrow of General Rojas Pinilla, in 1957, which led to the establishment of the National Front, the tight political structure of the government coupled with the ideological radicalisation of student factions created a fertile ground for acute antagonism. It expressed itself in student demonstrations, strikes and riots, which were met with ever higher levels of force and repression. In November 1965, the Minister of War, General Revéiz, declared that the National University was another 'Independent

⁷ The university population in Colombia was less than 20,000 in 1958, whereas by 1974 it had surpassed the figure of 140,000. A growing middle class found that a professional qualification could provide a path to success in society. Private institutions grew faster, though. In 1945 private universities (mostly denominational) had just 27% of university students. In 1974, the percentage had risen to 47%. Conversely, the National University, which represented 45% of the total university population in 1940, hardly reached 20% in 1970. It was also due to the creation of new universities. By 1960 there were only twenty universities, twelve of which were founded between 1945–1960. During the 1960s, seventeen new universities were created. (Cf. le Bot, 1979: 72-74) Contrary to what happened in other countries such as Mexico, Argentina and Uruguay, in Colombia the demands for new opportunities of professional and technical qualification by a growing middle class did not result in the creation of mass universities. (The National University had no more than 15,000 students in 1974). The creation of small universities with a limited academic offer responded to a rather anarchic process of individual or collective initiatives and interests. Ivon le Bot, *Educación e ideología en Colombia* (Bogotá: La Carreta, 1979), 71-75.

Republic'.⁸ Valencia's government then decreed a state of siege, as a legal way of dealing with student strikes. The new president, the Liberal Carlos Lleras, 1966–1970, went even further with the University through decree 2128 of 1966, which reinforced military powers to deal with student affairs.⁹ After the police raid on the university in October 1966, and the persecution of students and teachers of the faculty of Sociology, Fals-Borda protested in an open letter written from New York against the National Front's searching for scapegoats such as university activist groups or, as usual, the Communists to cover its own failings: 'La insidiosa campaña que algunos grupos han vuelto a desencadenar contra la sociología como ciencia y profesión, ciencia que les perturba porque destruye con hechos y datos su visión acomodaticia y egoísta de la realidad nacional' (*El Tiempo* 14 November 1966). The conflict between the status quo and the university reflected one of the inherent contradictions of the National Front: it was meant to be a 'democratic convalescence' in order to restore legal and administrative institutions and re-establish the constitution; however, its nature was at odds with the ever-faster changing reality of the country. As Sanín and Guataquí pointed out, it became 'a symbol of aloofness and corruption,' often under the control of personal fiefdoms.¹⁰

⁸ Francisco Leal, 'La frustración política de una generación,' in *Camilo Torres y la Universidad Nacional* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional, 2002), 207.

⁹ In November 1964, the presidential candidate Carlos Lleras Restrepo's talk at the National University was met by loud jeering from a group of students, who additionally detained the politician for two hours until the Minister of Education followed by a military regiment rescued him. On 24 October 1966, Carlos Lleras, now president, along with John D. Rockefeller attended the opening ceremony of the Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario, one of the many projects the latter had supported at the University. No sooner had the protest broken out than the army invaded the university and detained 76 students, who were judged in military courts. Sixty of them were sentenced. They were leaders of the Federación Universitaria Nacional (FUN), which meant the dismemberment of the university student movement. In 1967, after new demonstrations on a national scale against an increase in the tariff of public transport, 1500 soldiers and tanks occupied the National University and 600 students were detained. Leal, 'La frustración política,' 202–204.

¹⁰ 'In towns and municipalities, for example, traditional leaders were able to create stable fiefdoms by the control of the municipal council, the mayor and the judiciary. At the national level, the politicians had the power of setting their own salaries and travel agendas, and they were not above using this prerogative as a bargaining chip, especially when the executive needed the urgent approval of critical bills.' Francisco Gutiérrez and Juan Carlos Guataquí, 'The Colombian Case: Peace-Making and Power Sharing.' Accessed 12 October 2016. <http://web.worldbank.org/archive/website01241/WEB/IMAGES/COLOMBIA.PDF>.

Fals-Borda's generation, which came of age in the 1950s and 1960s, without responsibility for the original implementation of *la Violencia*, called themselves 'the State of Siege Generation' (in October 1949, President Ospina decreed state of siege which was not an exception but the rule until the new constitution of 1991).¹¹ It was a generation of intellectuals, scholars and politicians such as Mario Arrubla, Antonio García, José Gutiérrez, Jorge Gaitán Durán and Gerardo Molina, who grew scornful of the political establishment for its elitism and authoritarianism and above all for its inability to recognise and tackle the deep social crisis the country faced after both the internal crisis brought about by the years of *la Violencia* and the new international scenario for which Colombia was ill-prepared. To this generation — the first one that never knew an extended period of peace in Colombia — Fals-Borda had, as he wrote, 'the misfortune and also the challenging privilege to belong.'¹²

In 1949, in the letter mentioned in Chapter 1 to Gabriel Ospina, Director of the project of Vianí, Fals-Borda had described his as 'a new generation able to foster change for the better of the country'.¹³ His consciousness of belonging to a new generation came partly from his years as a student at the American School, where he had been a member of the Grupo Barranquilla, and the Presbyterian Youth Centre.¹⁴ The meaning Fals-Borda attributed to 'his generation' acquired a political tone in 1967. In the prologue to *Subversion* (1967), Fals-Borda spoke of Camilo Torres as the symbol of the generation of *la Violencia*: '[Camilo Torres] was a moral subversive, the kind

¹¹ Between 1949 and 1991, Colombia spent thirty years under state of emergency and military law had jurisdiction over 30% of the laws stipulated in the penal code. Mauricio García, 'Un país de estados de excepción' (*El Espectador*, 11 October 2008).

¹² Fals-Borda, introduction LVC, 23.

¹³ Archivo Central e Histórico, Universidad Nacional, Fondo Orlando Fals-Borda (ACH-UN, FOFB). Digital. Folder Documentos Personales, sub-folder Instituto_Antropología_Social_Colombia_02.

¹⁴ 'Desde su temprana obra [Fals-Borda] expresaba su incomodidad frente a la cultura letrada, elitista, endogámica y conservadora, que pretendía un papel hegemónico en su país [ante lo cual] se empeñaba en contribuir a gestar una tradición colombiana y latinoamericana en las ciencias sociales, que suponía una asimilación y recreación de corrientes y autores, en especial norteamericanos.' Jaramillo, introduction to *Antología* (2010), 8.

that blazes paths. For this reason, the dedication of this book is not merely an act of friendship but one of just recognition of his contribution to the understanding of the meaning of the times in which we live', as will be discussed further in section 3.¹⁵

Most representative members of the generation of *la Violencia* possessed a deep sense of commitment; the problem they faced was the 'how'. The new ideological alignment was more than a division between those in favour or against the status quo. Dissension, antagonism and even hate among those who aspired to a different order worked in favour of the very status quo that they opposed. Herein lay the relevance of Camilo Torres's pluralism. Hence, the dilemmas that Fals-Borda and his generation faced in pursuit of their dignity as scholars and citizens were the same that a whole generation of committed intellectuals faced in Latin America. Working out the 'how' was common and critical to them all.

1.2. In pursuit of his historical dignity

In the introduction to Chapter 1, it was mentioned that a great many essays and reviews on Fals-Borda have given 1967 as the year of a significant 'epistemological rupture', the symbol of which is Fals-Borda's *Subversion* (1967), a book written 'in the heat of the moment' after both his resignation as Dean of the Faculty of Sociology of the National University and the death of Camilo Torres. It was also argued that such eagerness to divide Fals-Borda's career into clear-cut stages not only leads to inappropriate generalisations but also misses a few continuities in his intellectual trajectory. It is nonetheless from them that his critique of the ideologies of the political violence can be better understood. Indeed, Fals-Borda's correspondence in relation to

¹⁵ Fals-Borda, *Subversion*, xiii.

his *Subversion* seems to indicate that writing this book was by no means an act of rebellion or a reaction to fateful events.

In March 1966, one month after Camilo Torres's death, Fals-Borda wrote to Donald Sandberg of the Ford Foundation with regard to the renewal of the grant for the Faculty of Sociology, stating: 'My resignation affects only my present position as Dean, and does not alter my basic relationship with the Faculty. I feel that I have served enough time in an administrative capacity, postponing my research work and being left behind in scientific achievement'.¹⁶ His resignation came after an important reform that Fals-Borda himself fostered in 1965. His idea that 'today it is impossible to work fruitfully as a social scientist isolated from colleagues of kindred disciplines,' resulted by 1965 in the creation of three new departments within the new Faculty of Sociology: Anthropology, Geography and Social Work.¹⁷ Almost immediately afterwards, Fals-Borda proposed a wider process of academic, curricular and administrative integration. For him, and for 'some authoritative circles' he had consulted, this reform would be of paramount importance in both academic and social terms.¹⁸ In early 1966, the integration of the departments of Sociology with those of History, Philosophy, Philology, Economics, Education and Psychology resulted in the grand faculty about which Fals-Borda wrote to Lynn Smith in April 1966: 'We finally completed the process of integration of social science in this University with the creation of the Faculty of Philosophy and Human Science ... we are very pleased with these developments, which show the will to renovate on the part of this university.'¹⁹

¹⁶ Letter on 17 March 1966. Archivo Central e Histórico, Universidad Nacional, Fondo Acumulado Facultad de Sociología (ACH-UN, FAFS), Box 1415, Folder 6_3.

¹⁷ Fals-Borda, letter of resignation as Dean of the Faculty of Sociology, on 7 February 1966. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1415, Folder 6_5.

¹⁸ Fals-Borda, 'Draft proposal of academic and administrative reform.' ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1415, Folder 6_6-8.

¹⁹ Letter on 9 April 1966. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1415, Folder 6_1. See also Chapter 4, footnote 77.

Although the integration was partially achieved, there were serious differences among the deans involved regarding the criteria, philosophy and methods that should be used. In view of the deans' inability to reach an agreement, Fals-Borda tendered his resignation and invited the other deans to do so, leaving the university authorities totally free to carry on with the reform without their interference. As he wrote to Lynn Smith in March, one month after his resignation: 'I am particularly very pleased because I could leave the university at peace with everybody and in a sense having completed my mission at this stage.'²⁰

After his irrevocable letter of resignation as Dean of the Faculty, Fals-Borda was promoted to full Professor, which entailed a nine-year appointment, and was granted an official commission to go abroad for one year in order to, as he wrote: 'Refresh my sociological training, write a book — pending for three years — on peasant transformation in Colombia, and then resume my normal teaching.'²¹ As indicated in the previous chapter this project on 'peasant transformation' became a sociological study on subversion, a study that despite its political aim did not take him away from his intellectual career. Thus, *Subversion* was in fact a return to academic research, which affirmed his role as agent of social change — not the other way round. Two months after Camilo Torres's death, Fals-Borda wrote to Lynn Smith: 'Politics is always a temptation here. But I have decided in favour of scholarship.'²²

²⁰ Letter on 9 April 1966. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1415, Folder 6_1. In his letter of resignation, he also reminded the Head of the University that at the request of the university authorities he had postponed some academic commitments with the Universities of Harvard, Wisconsin and Münster during the year 1965 in order to participate in the project of integration. Fals-Borda, letter of resignation. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1415, Folder 6_8.

²¹ Letter to D. Sandberg on 17 March 1966. FAFS, Box 1415, Folder 6_3.

²² Letter on 9 April 1966. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1415, Folder 6_1.

2. Subversion as a sociological category of historical analysis

Fals-Borda's self-reflection on *Subversion* when it was first published in 1967 was that, in spite of its sophisticated frame of reference and consistent methodology, the style was heavy, sometimes confusing and overcharged with sociological jargon.²³ In the prologue to the second edition of *Subversion* (1968), Fals-Borda explained that two main issues had rushed him into publishing the first edition. The first reason was both intellectual and spiritual: to understand the causes of the collective frustrations of the Colombian people, which in turn, questioned the role that the Generation of *la Violencia* must play in future. Camilo Torres's death in February 1966 had spurred reflection on a different meaning of subversion in the Colombian context. The second reason for early publication was that signs of ideological and political renewal had arisen from the Liberal Party in the mid-1960s, which in Fals-Borda's opinion had to be encouraged. As he wrote:

Son tan escasas las oportunidades históricas en que se articulan grupos rebeldes en las capas superiores de la sociedad, que el descubrir aún los más pequeños síntomas de una 'anti-élite' me llenó de esperanza no sólo como científico social colocado ante la posibilidad de ver confirmarse ante sus ojos una de sus hipótesis, sino como colombiano interesado desde hace muchos años en buscar soluciones constructivas a los problemas sociales.²⁴

The rebel groups Fals-Borda talked about were the Movimiento Revolucionario Liberal (MRL), founded by Alfonso Lopez Michelsen, son of President Alfonso Lopez Pumarejo, and himself president 1974–1978, and El Grupo de La Ceja, with whom Fals-Borda had made contact. On 10 October 1966, Fals-Borda had written from New York to the leader of La Ceja group, the Colombian liberal senator Hernando Agudelo Villa, a politician whom Fals-Borda had known during his official duties at the Ministry

²³ Fals-Borda, *Subversion* (1968), ix.

²⁴ Fals-Borda, *Subversion* (1968), xiv.

of Agriculture whilst Agudelo Villa worked at the Economy and Finance Ministry in the early 1960s. The senator was in the public gaze for both his book criticising the Alliance for Progress's Policies and for his dissident political faction. Fals-Borda's conviction that the country and liberalism were in urgent need of ideological reform prompted his letter to Agudelo Villa:

Yo no soy un político, ni tengo carisma, ni sirvo para hacer campañas; pero puedo colaborar un poco con la pluma y el pensamiento. En estos días estoy trabajando en mi próximo libro, titulado 'El cambio social en la historia: Esbozo de una interpretación por Colombia', por lo cual he tenido que volver a leer las fuentes de que derivamos el conocimiento histórico de nuestro país. La historia como siempre, es grande maestra. Me ha estado enseñando cosas nuevas, y enfoques diferentes, y me está llevando a conclusiones prácticas sobre el momento actual y el futuro inmediato. Quisiera ofrecerle esta ayuda intelectual, si usted estima que le puede servir en su meritoria campaña.²⁵

Fals-Borda's attempt to liaise with a new politically dissident movement within the Liberal Party met with disappointment. Between the first and second editions of his book in Spanish (1967 and 1968), both La Ceja group and the MRL had surrendered to the party machinery. The absence of real opposition left a significant void in the political arena. In fact, the MRL's dissidence had been more strategic than anything else — it had served to prevent a large number of liberals dissatisfied with the National Front from abandoning the party. As Lopez Michelsen himself observed, his MRL channelled popular frustration so as to preserve the political structure.²⁶

The political circumstances may explain the 'urgency' with which the book was revised. In the 1968 edition, Fals-Borda polished the style and eliminated the excessive use of

²⁵ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro Subversión_Colombia_07.

²⁶ When the leadership of the Liberal Party called Alfonso Lopez Michelsen to re-integrate the ranks of the National Front in 1965, Lopez Michelsen replied: 'Ninguna ventaja traería para el liberalismo una union mecánica en las circunstancias presentes y, en cambio, significaría, seguramente, la desertión hacia otros campos no liberales de efectivos que hoy se aglutinan al rededor del MRL. Yo no he hecho una disidencia personalista del MRL contra el Partido Liberal para perjudicarlo, sino disidencia doctrinaria para salvarlo. Si el liberalismo sigue siendo mayoría en el país es merced a la circunstancia de tener clavada una bandera del lado de la inconformidad mientras otros sirven la causa del gobierno al servicio del Frente Nacional' (*El Espectador*, 11 May 1965).

jargon. The major change, however, and one usually overlooked by Fals-Borda's critics, was that the second edition of *Subversion* marked Fals-Borda's radical rupture with the politics of the National Front. In letter to the Cuban Ambassador for the United Nations, Mario García Inchauste, Fals-Borda wrote in August 1968: 'Recordará usted que al entregarle una copia de mi libro sobre "La Subversion en Colombia", le informé que la nueva versión va a ser muy distinta, especialmente en cuanto a la orientación ideológica y política que he venido adoptando por el análisis de la historia y de la sociedad colombiana en los últimos años. Como la publicación toma tiempo, me he permitido ahora enviarle dos artículos que ilustran mejor la evolución de mis ideas.'²⁷

Subversion (1968) was addressed to a new generation of non-conformists, dissidents and political activists beyond the traditional political cadres (which included liberals, conservatives, outmoded and sectarian communists and socialists). The objective had also been redefined: 'To do subversion well'.²⁸

2.1. Subversion, not revolution

The sociologist José A. Silva Michelena, to whom Fals-Borda had shown the first draft of *Subversion* (1967), asked him 'Why not simply use revolution instead of subversion?'²⁹ As mentioned in the previous chapter, *Subversion* was written after the 1966 WCC World Conference, where the topic of revolution had been widely discussed; Fals-Borda was indeed aware of the potential ambiguities of the use of 'revolution'. Thus, *Subversion* was not an attempt to emulate Shaull's historical–

²⁷ These articles were: 'La subversion justificada y su importancia histórica,' which was the first chapter of *Revoluciones inconclusas en América Latina* (1970); 'Sentido Actual de los Movimientos Guerrilleros,' a talk presented in the Royal British Institute of International Affairs, London, 1968. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Bolivia,Cuba,Ecuador,Mexico_Cuba_23

²⁸ Fals-Borda, *Subversion*. 1968, xvi.

²⁹ Letter on 10 January 1967. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro Subversión_Colombia_52.

theological approach to revolution. Fals-Borda's primary goal was to demythologise the notion of subversion so that it could be used as a distinctive category in sociological analysis, upon which he could hinge his dialectical approach to Colombian history.

The book's major concern was the complex relationship between power and violence in the transition between social orders, and factors that influenced such transitions in Colombia. In terms of sociology of knowledge, it was ambitious; within the framework of sociology of conflict, it sought to establish a point where Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* and Gustave Landaeur's theory of revolution met. Its even more ambitious aim was to lay down the basis for a 'master theory' able to 'take a snapshot' of the transitional process, to enable the analysis of its cause-and-effect in its historical context.³⁰ According to Fals-Borda, such an attempt to harmonise the structural with the dynamic in order to understand a process of change in the past would provide a valid historical basis for the analysis of change in present-day Colombia — 'a society that tends to elude scientific analysis'.³¹

To understand the dialectics of Colombian history, Fals-Borda presented the traditional political hegemony against the backdrop of collective endeavours that arose over the years for transforming society. In order to demonstrate how such a dialectic manifests as

³⁰ Fals-Borda re-elaborated Mannheim's notion of both ideologies and utopias as 'intellectual structures'. For Mannheim, utopias promote and direct actions that lead to change, ideologies inhibit them. Based on his own historical analysis of pre-capitalist Colombian rural society, Fals-Borda recognised that both ideology and utopia were hinged upon a sturdy socio-cultural structure, without which it was impossible either to understand local realities or foster social change. By making of Camilo Torres's utopia an ideology for action, Fals-Borda's *Subversion* re-elaborated Mannheim's notion of dialectical progress. On the other hand, Fals-Borda was interested in Landaeur not only for the latter's social and ethical anarchism but for his recovery of the spiritual elements of revolution. Landaeur identified Thomas Münzer as the first modern revolutionary — a key historical reference for Fals-Borda (see section 3). As Fals-Borda explained: 'While both [Mannheim and Landaeur] postulated the role of a subversive minority in the inception of a utopia, neither was able to indicate which other elements intervene in the revolutionary period. This is a vacuum that very much deserves to be filled.' On the other hand, 'scholars tend to jump from one stage of historical development to another, pointing out that there is an acute period of transition, but without giving systematic information concerning its nature'. Fals-Borda, *Subversion*, 4-5. In relation to Landaeur's anarchist socialism and mystic utopianism, see Michael Löwy, *Redención y Utopía: El judaísmo libertario en Europa Central* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones El Cielo por Asalto, 1997), 129-160.

³¹ Fals-Borda, *Subversion*, 6.

social phenomena, Fals-Borda borrowed from Mannheim and Gellner four components — social values, social norms, social organisation and techniques — to standardise the analysis of social order.³² The process undermining the old order is ‘subversion’: a condition reflecting the internal incongruities of the social order recognised during a specified historical period in the light of new, more highly valued goals.³³

With this framework, Fals-Borda analysed the transition and adjustment of four social orders in the history of Colombia.³⁴ He observed that, with the exception of the social order resulting from the Catholic-Hispanic utopia (consolidated throughout three centuries), only marginal changes had occurred in the national history. In contrast to political historiography, he also criticised descriptions of the War of Independence (1810–1819) and liberal reforms of the mid-nineteenth century as ‘revolutions’ since none had attempted to transform the social order solidly established during the colonial order. Therefore, to understand the nature of social change in Colombia, he analysed earlier attempts to subvert the status quo during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In his review of Fals-Borda’s *Subversion*, the Latin American specialist, William McGreevey, commented that: ‘If one observes more carefully the porosity of Colombia’s elite and its ability to recruit middle-class dissidents without causing social

³² Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (1941, 1960); Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (1965). In Hegelian terms Fals-Borda explains that under the impact of a utopian new order, the relative stability among these four elements erodes and, after a process of transition, more or less conflicting, the resultant innovations are institutionalised: giving way to a new topia, which in turn will be countered by another subversive utopia. Fals-Borda, *Subversion*, 13-25.

³³ Definition modified in the second edition in Spanish, 1968, and the English one, 1969, after Eugen Havens’s letter (hand-written without date). Havens focused on the definition of subversion provided originally by *Subversion*, 1967. According to this, ‘subversion is that condition which reflects the internal incongruities of a social order’ (p. 17). In that case ‘it may be better to recognise that subversion is omnipresent.’ However, as Havens pointed out: ‘The key factor is that sometimes actors of that social order perceive these incongruities and become concerned about them. This is when subversion occurs.’ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro Subversión_Colombia_59.

³⁴ 1) The rule of the pre-Colombian group, the Chibchas, and its domination by the Spanish conquest; 2) the three-century seigniorial order with its Hispanic peace, and its partial liberal-democratic transition in the mid-nineteenth century; 3) the seigniorial-bourgeois order after the Conservative hegemony, 1885, and the socialist transition whose ideology appeared in Colombia after 1925; 4). the liberal-bourgeois of the National Front and the short-life neo-socialist subversion of Camilo Torres.

change, one must take a pessimistic view of the potential for revolution in Colombia today.’³⁵ Fals-Borda endorsed McGreevey’s criticism. In fact, he took it further: the nature of power in the late 1960s — based on the advanced technologies of war and repression, sophisticated social control, and the increasingly complex social organisation of urban-industrial communities — had rendered obsolete the classical model of revolution originating in eighteenth century Europe.³⁶ Indeed, by the time that the English edition of *Subversion* was published in 1969, most Latin American countries had, in despair, given up all hope for a Cuban-style revolution. Colombia was no exception. In this respect, Fals-Borda’s notion of subversion was, as will be discussed later, his response to the claim (Debray called it a ‘cliché’) that the Cuban revolution could no longer be repeated in Latin America.³⁷ Therefore, it was because, not in spite, of the changing conditions that were making revolution less likely, that Fals-Borda strove to retain the distinction between ‘subversion’ and ‘revolution’, the latter a household word devalued by the Liberal Party’s reformism.³⁸

2.2. Subversion: a category of critical analysis

In his paper delivered at the 11th Annual Foyer John Knox Lecture, Geneva, then revised and presented to the Sodepax Assembly, Rome, both in 1970, Fals-Borda reflected more deeply on the practical and theoretical implications of the use of ‘subversion’. Incorporating suggestions received before and after the publication of his

³⁵ William McGreevey, review of *Subversion and Social Change in Colombia*, by Fals-Borda, *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 50, no. 2 (1970): 392.

³⁶ As Fals-Borda wrote to Armando Valenzuela from Geneva: En Colombia se ha creado capas inter-medias conformistas, que comparan su situación de hoy con la del pasado y lo ven todo mejor. Esta es una de las expresiones más agudas de la inteligencia de nuestra clase dirigente, que permiten alguna movilidad social y el cambio marginal. Cómo romper esta restricción es la tarea subversiva del momento.’ Letter on 26 August 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Ginebra_Suiza_16.

³⁷ Debray, *Revolución en la revolución*, 15.

³⁸ Reformist governments such as Alfonso Lopez Pumarejo’s *Revolución en Marcha*, 1934–1938, 1942–1945, and Alfonso Lopez Michelsen’s *Movimiento Revolucionario Liberal*, 1974–1978.

Subversion (1967), Fals-Borda explained the epistemological and historical basis of his new concept: ‘Today subversion seems to be in each place where significant social transformations are taking place.’³⁹ However, he acknowledged that his definition of ‘subversion’ significantly differed from that in general usage since Gaius Sallust wrote the *Catilinarian Conspiracy* (circ. 44–40 BC). Sallust, an aristocrat accused of corruption, described Catiline (who attempt to overthrow the power of the aristocratic Senate) as a deliberate foe of law, order and morality.⁴⁰ Ever since, Fals-Borda noted, the concept *subvertere* had been synonymous with violent and destructive actions — as modern dictionaries show.⁴¹

Those who abhor the mere idea of subversion, Fals-Borda argued, ignore the genuine cases of subversion. Over time, fomenters of subversion have come to be recognised as heroes or even saints, especially in Jewish and Christian cultures. As Rev. Castillo-Cárdenas wrote to Fals-Borda: ‘En efecto, en los orígenes semi-mitológicos de la tradición Judeo-Cristiana — columna vertebral de la civilización occidental — la comunidad surge de una subversión acaudillada por Moisés y legitimada por el mismo Jehová.’⁴² Moses, rallying his people against the tyranny of the Pharaohs, and the prophetic voices of social protest in the Old Testament, called for another meaning of subversion.⁴³

Subvertere acquired the connotation of evil or heresy after the Christianisation of the Roman Empire because its judges were no longer secular but clerical. Now subversion

³⁹ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro Subversión_Colombia_79. See handwritten notes and letters examined by the author of this thesis. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro Subversión_Colombia_40-90. Some of them discussed in this section.

⁴⁰ Accused of adultery with a Vestal Virgin.

⁴¹ Fals-Borda’s hand-written notes with definitions of subversion from various dictionaries: ‘To overturn from the foundation; to overthrow; to ruin utterly; to destroy; to upset uproot or the like. “Who labor to subvert those great pillars of human happiness.” – Washington. ‘To destroy completely the existence, potency, soundness, etc., of; to render futile, void, inoperative or the like; as to subvert another’s arguments, the principles of religion, the constitution or the government (Webster Dictionary).’ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro Subversión_Colombia_51.

⁴² Letter from Gonzalo Castillo to Fals-Borda, New York, on 17 January 1967. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro Subversión_Colombia_63.

⁴³ Fals-Borda, *Subversion*, 8.

‘purported to be based on an open doctrinal choice different from the God-given alternative adopted by the hierarchy of the Christian Church. Therefore, political subversion was equated to sin and associated with the Greek term for choice, heresy (hairesis)’.⁴⁴ Against the backdrop of the medieval perception of subversion — philosophically framed within Thomas Aquinas’s disquisition on heresy⁴⁵ — Fals-Borda analysed the trials of Jan Hus at the Council of Constance (1415) and Thomas Münzer (1525).⁴⁶ He also noted that the precursors of Latin American independence were charged with subversion for ‘writing contrary to the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church’, even though the scope of their rebellions was significantly larger. Ironically, as Fals-Borda noted, even in those new republics established after radical and generalised subversion, subversion was still considered an immoral act and its perpetrators anti-social no matter what the condition of society is or how just is his challenge.⁴⁷

The persistence of a pejorative understanding of ‘subversion’ in the face of historical evidence showing that it can be a force for significant social change was for Fals-Borda

⁴⁴ Fals-Borda’s ‘Subversion: A Central Concern.’ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro Subversión_Colombia_80.

⁴⁵ ‘On their own side, [heretics] deserve not only to be separated from the Church by excommunication, but also to be severed from the world by death ... On the part of the Church, however, there is mercy which looks to the conversion of the wanderer, wherefore she condemns not at once, but "after the first and second admonition", as the Apostle directs: after that, if he is yet stubborn, the Church no longer hoping for his conversion, looks to the salvation of others, by excommunicating him and separating him from the Church, and furthermore delivers him to the secular tribunal to be exterminated thereby from the world by death.’ Thomas Aquinas, ‘Question 11, Article 3: Whether heretics ought to be tolerated?’ in *The Summa Theologica. Complete Edition* (New York: Catholic Way Publishing, 2014), QQ [1], 46.

⁴⁶ The former, Fals-Borda wrote: ‘A child of the peasantry’ whose attempt to give national identity to the Bohemians and insistence on ‘social equality and freedom of thought’ were in open confrontation with “a Simonitic clergy backed by an Emperor who wanted to retain economic and political control of his subjects in Bohemia”. The latter: ‘A communist who discovered the bonds between theology and politics through the reading of the Book of Daniel, was dangerous even to Luther who, after being a subversive himself, chose to play the prince’s game of reactionary violence against the justly rebellious peasants.’ Fals-Borda’s hand-writing notes on ‘L’Apologie de Münzer’ (in French and English) from Ernst Bloch, *Thomas Münzer. Theologian de la Revolution*, Paris, Julliard, 1964; and Joseph Kalmer and Paul Roubiczek, *Warrior of God. The life and death of John Hus* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1947). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro Subversión_Colombia_47-51.

⁴⁷ Colombian law 61 of 1888 by which the National Congress authorised the President of the Republic: ‘To close ... all societies which under scientific or doctrinal pretences become centre of revolutionary propaganda or subversive teachings.’ Fals-Borda, ‘Subversion: A Central Concern,’ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro Subversión_Colombia_82.

an epistemological problem rather than one of semantics. This led him to a crucial conclusion: ‘In view of the present “revolutionary social vacuum”, more effective political models with more complex strategies for political action are necessary. I think that subversion,’ wrote Fals-Borda, ‘when broadly understood, provides one of those political models ... in which the violent revolutionary upburst (sic) is simply its crowning act.’⁴⁸

According to Fals-Borda, subversion, dialectically conceived, and stripped of its traditional association with immorality, renders a two-fold service: it unveils the internal contradictions within any social order and sheds light on new valued goals based on the struggle and experiences of previous generations. In this vein, as mentioned in Chapter 4, subversion, with its theological background, was not only a strategy of political struggle but also a form of remembrance.

2.3. Subversion and heterodox historical analysis

Although Fals-Borda’s *Subversion* (1967) was written with a sense of ‘urgency’ — ‘as though there were great need to save a seriously ill patient’ — it was widely discussed before its publication.⁴⁹ Fals-Borda had the opportunity to discuss it with his students and colleagues during the academic year of 1966 as Visiting Professor of Sociology in the University of Wisconsin. In January 1967 Fals-Borda presented it in the Institute of Latin American Studies at Columbia University, New York. He also had the comments of a number of well-known Latin American and USA sociologists on his project.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Fals-Borda, ‘Subversion: A Central Concern.’ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro Subversión_Colombia_84.

⁴⁹ Fals-Borda, ‘Science and Commitment: Methodological Problems of the Book *La Subversion en Colombia*,’ (Paper presented at Münster University, 6–22 November, 1967), published in *Revista Colombiana de Sociología*, vol. 34, no. 2 (2011): 178.

⁵⁰ See *Subversion*, xiii–xiv. Letter from José A. Silva Michelena (Central University of Venezuela), Frank Bonilla (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Alvaro Camacho Guizado and Fernando

In November 1967, a few months after the publication of *Subversion*, Fals-Borda was invited to the Second Colloquium of Social Science organised by the University of Münster, Germany, to discuss issues related to the method (see footnotes 30-34 this chapter). Although such an attempt to combine critical theory and heterodox political activism was not new, Fals-Borda's teleetic analysis of subversion drew the attention of international scholars.

In contrast, in Colombia *Subversion* was given a cold shoulder. Dependency Theory had become the key tenet of social science. According to Raúl Prebisch, one of the U.N. economists who proposed the centre-periphery formulation, it concerned the relationship between centres and the periphery whereby a country is subjected to decisions taken in the centres, not only in economic matters, but also in domestic and foreign policy strategies.⁵¹ In this vein, the intellectual Mario Arrubla, for whom dependency was inherent in capitalism, had written that 'scholars hoping to understand Colombia from any other than a *dependentista* stance were either buffoons or villains'.⁵²

Fals-Borda's *Subversion* did not endorse such a claim unreservedly. By analysing the dialectics of development in Colombia, *Subversion* argued that national elites had had an ample margin for autonomous development that they manipulated for their own benefit, which in turn laid the ground for Fals-Borda's notion of moral subversion. *La Violencia*, illustrated this point.⁵³ However, as it transpired, the focus of debate moved to the joint dedication of the book to both Camilo Torres and the liberal

Uricoechea (National University Colombia) and Gonzalo Castillo. ACH-UN, FOFB, Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro_Subversion_Colombia.

⁵¹ Ronald Chilcote, *Theories of Development and Under-development* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), 26.

⁵² Mario Arrubla, *Estudios sobre el subdesarrollo colombiano*, 7th ed. (Medellín: Editorial la Carreta, 1974), 33.

⁵³ As López de Mesa pointed out, the political police did not reach the cities located on the northern coast because the conservative governor Abel Carbonell refused the offer from the central government to send forces to repress social disorder. (*El Tiempo*, 30 September 1962); the same in the region of Nariño. Fals-Borda, 'The Role of Violence,' 29.

politician Otto Morales.⁵⁴ Sociologist J.M. Rojas Guerra remembered: ‘Quienes recibimos el libro siendo estudiantes de sociología en la Universidad Nacional de Colombia y habiendo sido sus alumnos, lo que encontramos inaceptable fue que, en la dedicatoria, Otto Morales estuviese al lado de Camilo [Torres].’⁵⁵

With the publication of the English version (1969), the book’s method, framework and its interpretative flaws received more attention in U.S. journals.⁵⁶ Most critics agreed that Fals-Borda misjudged the Liberal reforms of 1850. As McGreevey explains: ‘Fals-Borda holds that the Radical Liberals “subverted” the old order in the years between 1847 and 1854, but were subsequently co-opted.’ In fact, as the critic goes on, ‘the Radical Liberals were functionally equivalent to the merchant class.’ And Frank Safford commented: ‘The liberal youths, therefore, did not have to be pressured or

⁵⁴ Otto Morales, politician and historian, who was Minister of Agriculture during the time Fals-Borda worked as vice-minister and technical director of the Agrarian Reform project, 1959–1960. In the second Spanish edition, Otto Morales’s name disappeared from the dedication. However, the book had already fallen into political ‘discredit’ for both the Left and the Right.

⁵⁵ Rojas Guerra, introduction to *Antología*, by Fals-Borda (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional, 2010), xxx. In the letter to sociologist María Cristiana Salazar, Álvaro Camacho Guizado, who was doing his PhD in Minnesota, wrote: ‘Que justificación hay en agrupar a Camilo, Carlos Lleras y a los estudiantes como campeones de la nueva subversión pluralista. ¿Y los de La Ceja? Tememos que los de La Ceja han hallado su nuevo ideólogo, y tememos que nuestro amado decano sea co-optado por ese semi-centro-izquierda juguetera-remoza-partidos-liberales decadentes.’ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro_Subversión_Colombia_15. Venezuelan Sociologist, J. A. Silva Michelena, had also warned Fals-Borda on the peril of linking his notion of subversion to the cadres of the Liberal Party: ‘Seguramente no se te escapa lo peligroso que puede ser esta estrategia. La captación positiva tiene una fuerza muy grande y, además, puede alienar a los propios subversores.’ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro_Subversión_Colombia_54.

⁵⁶ Miles Richardson pointed out that ‘the theoretical model of this creative work surely overstates the degree to which a society is united in purpose. And the neglect of the Colombian Negro is surprising. These two criticisms aside, the book has those qualities we expect from this prominent Colombian sociologist: scholarship, close attention to detail, and a passionate concern for Colombia.’ Miles Richardson, review of *Subversion and Social Change in Colombia*, by Fals-Borda, *American Anthropologist*, vol. 73, issue 4 (1971): 868. For A. Angell, the book as sociology seemed a little obvious, even sometimes pretentious, ‘but as history and polemic it is provocative and persuasively argued, throwing about enough ideas and theories for several books.’ Alan Angell, review of *Subversion and Social Change in Colombia*, by Fals-Borda, *International Affairs*, vol. 46, no. 4 (1970): 896. Robert Dix noted that, at times, ‘the scheme seems to impose itself on the facts and the analysis must also support a burdensome jargon.’ Although, he argues: ‘It suggests categories and interpretations which can serve as the beginning points for better ordering our conceptions of the developmental process in Latin America.’ Robert Dix, review of *Subversion and Social Change in Colombia*, by Fals-Borda, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, vol. 389 (1970): 167.

co-opted ... thus the young liberals did not 'take the side' of the Bogotá dandies, they were the dandies.'⁵⁷

In spite of the book's merits (such as its framework, which 'made the book defensible in sociological and historical terms,' as Eugen Haven put it⁵⁸) and shortcomings (such as its interpretation of liberal reformism in nineteenth century), *Subversion* had fulfilled its primary aim: to transform Colombian history into a field of discursive exchange. In so doing, Fals-Borda strove to prevent the memory of past struggles from sinking into oblivion and hence, stop his socio-historical research from 'the danger of becoming a tool of the ruling classes'.⁵⁹ One of the merits of *Subversion*, and perhaps the one least appreciated, is that it recognised, against the backdrop of overwhelming bipartisan political structure, the links between socialist ideology and the struggle of some groups during *la Violencia*. Accordingly, he interpreted *la Violencia* as the anti-climax of the socialist movement in 1948. Studies on the Gaitanista movement, carried out during the late 1980s and the 1990s, supported this opinion (see Chapter 2).

Subversion enabled him to see his own approach of theory of conflict to *la Violencia* (1962) from a more critical point of view. He observed that social disintegration and political collapse during *la Violencia* coincided with great economic growth. Fals-Borda's idea that the dialectical process of modern violence cannot be apprehended outside the basis of historical materialism and the study of the socio-economic bases of production was presented in an interdisciplinary expert meeting on the study of the causes of violence in París, 1975.⁶⁰ Here, Fals-Borda observed that specific studies on

⁵⁷ McGreevey, review of *Subversion*, 391; Safford, review of *Subversion and Social Change in Colombia*, by Fals-Borda, *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 86, no. 4 (1971): 723.

⁵⁸ Letter from Eugen Havens (without date), ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro Subversión_Colombia_59.

⁵⁹ Benjamin, 'Theses, VI,' 391.

⁶⁰ Fals-Borda, 'Recent Trends in the Study of Political and Economic Causes of Violence and Prospects for Future Research,' (Paper presented at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

economic causes of violence in Colombia have been neglected. In contrast to his own analysis of *la Violencia*, based on local realities, Fals-Borda's criticism in the early 1970s recognised the structural causes which make possible the continuation of violence under the guise of 'development'. Against this context, Fals-Borda analysed the links between the former and new structural causes of violence in capitalist system, which led to violence becoming a daily routine or an accepted way of life, as a new brutal form of alienation of the rural population (see closing chapter).⁶¹

That is why McGreevey's review — perhaps the most piercing criticism written of *Subversion* — was the one which contradictorily best expressed the Benjaminian character of Fals-Borda's approach to Colombian history.⁶² As McGreevey remarked, 'the author here ransacks the past to find a few bits of evidence for subversive change while ignoring other social processes. Perhaps therein lies the failure of this book, written by an otherwise perceptive sociologist and historian.'⁶³ Frank Safford instead wondered 'whether Fals-Borda's misreading of *co-optation* in the nineteenth century represents simply a mistaken backward projection of current patterns. Possibly it also reflects self-deception about how *co-optation* occurs today'.⁶⁴ Camilo Torres, as will be examined in the next section, represented therefore the re-emergence of the subversive élan that had inspired previous generations.

Organisation, Paris, 12–15 November 1975). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro_La_Violencia_Colombia_20-33.

⁶¹ Fals-Borda, 'Recent Trends,' 22.

⁶² As Benjamin put it, 'Articulating the past historically does not mean recognising it "the way it really was."' It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger.' Theses, VI,' 391. See closing chapter.

⁶³ McGreevey, review of *Subversion*, 391-392.

⁶⁴ Safford, review of *Subversion*, 723.

3. Camilo Torres: The reiteration of the utopia

In 1962, Adolf Berle identified three major forces at work in Latin America: the Conservative landowners and their counterparts in the industrial centres, the liberal democratic forces of the Centre, and the radical Left, a tool of international Communism. For him, the forces of the Centre were ‘the real hope of effecting Latin American evolution without undergoing the ghastly experience of a generation of bloodshed, terror, civil war, exhaustion and eventual reconstruction’.⁶⁵ For Richard Shaul, U.S. policies for Latin America based on Berle’s criterion, that is, overestimating the forces of the Centre and concluding that the Left were paid agents of Moscow, was paving the way for the very disasters that Berle feared.⁶⁶ Excessive reliance on the Centre explains why, despite the ideological vitality of the Left, Teodoro Moscoso, the General Coordinator of the Alliance for Progress, claimed that a lack of a ‘positive ideological driver for reform was the major problem in Latin American politics’.⁶⁷

Aware of the danger of assuming the ideological confrontation to be an either–or dilemma, Fals-Borda did not overlook the fact that despite his short political life, Torres’s preaching of the new socialist revolution from a Christian point of view had become the crossroads at which many leftist factions converged.⁶⁸ Although the pluralist utopia was distorted by realities almost immediately after Camilo Torres expounded it, Fals-Borda stated that ‘there already exist the minimum ideological and organisational elements to initiate a new cycle of subversive development in Colombia that will lead to another order, the fifth of the historical series’.⁶⁹ Historical research was

⁶⁵ Adolf Berle, *Latin America: Diplomacy and Reality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 38.

⁶⁶ Shaul, *The New Revolutionary Mood in Latin America* (Pennsylvania: Buck Hill Falls, 1962), 15.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Shaul, *The New Revolutionary*, 16.

⁶⁸ Marxists, pro-Soviet Communist, pro-Cuban Maoist Communist, Christian Democrats and unaffiliated.

⁶⁹ Fals-Borda, *Subversion*, 170.

the means to recover such ideological drive, as Fals-Borda wrote in his 'Letter from Geneva': 'La ideología que nos una en un frente común debe estar alimentada por el estudio de nuestra historia ... Siendo que nuestra historia se conoce tan poco, yo mismo quisiera dedicar mis energías primordialmente a investigar y tratar de entender mi propia sociedad y su historia. Quiero dominar el pensamiento de Gaitán y el de Camilo Torres. Esta es la tradición de la que podemos obtener inspiración.'⁷⁰

This part of the chapter, concentrating on the utopian foundation upon which Fals-Borda built his ideology of subversion, is divided into the following three sections. Section one introduces Fals-Borda's Memorandum, in which he explained his ideological agenda. Section two below focuses on the key element of this Memorandum: Camilo Torres's praxis as ideology for action. The third section looks at Fals-Borda's non-ideological justification of violence, which is his criticism of Camilo Torres's justification of violence.

3.1. A trip to Cuba: a subversive itinerary

In early 1963, Fals-Borda, took issue with K. Silvert's 'The Students in Latin America', according to which 'revolutionary agitation in the university is ruinous, poisonous and destructive of the university as an institution'.⁷¹ For Fals-Borda such a generalisation was based on the 'horned devil' image of the students. Robert O. Williamson's research on the students of the National University of Colombia showed, Fals-Borda claimed, that the students were not a 'Communist-dominated disruptive group' but 'the children

⁷⁰ Fals-Borda, 'Carta de Ginebra.' ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Ginebra_Suiza_05-06.

⁷¹ Joint Committee on Latin American Studies, Conference on Continuity and Social Change in Latin America, 'Proceedings,' Arizona, 30 Jan–2 Feb 1963. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1442, Folder 8_87-102.

of ordinary people, although socially conscious'.⁷² Fals-Borda concluded that Silvert also ignored the fact that 'national universities can be viewed as the nation in miniature, as a capsule, and changes in the national society are reflected in the universities. As leaders of change, the students should have a revolutionary ideology'.⁷³

Three years later, Fals-Borda's words came true — the university truly reflected the now national social conflict and students had adopted radical revolutionary stances. At his return from the year abroad, 1966–1967, he found himself at the centre of such turbulence. On the one hand, the establishment accused him of being a subversive agitator for his defence of the university's autonomy and criticism of the National Front's repressive measures against public universities from 1965 onwards. On the other, those engaged in revolutionary movements accused him of being an undercover agent of the CIA and emissary of the USA imperialism.⁷⁴ Moreover, Fals-Borda's attempt to support ideologically the dissident group of La Ceja, and his friendship with high-rank politicians such as Otto Morales, enveloped him, in the students' eyes, with an aura of political ambiguity.⁷⁵ In October 1967, a campaign of discredit was organised by a group of students of the course of Rural Sociology. They published and distributed a Manifesto accusing Fals-Borda of lack of personal integrity, poor knowledge and favouritism.⁷⁶ Fals-Borda wrote a letter to the Dean of the Faculty explaining his unwillingness to engage in a feud with his students, thus he quit the course.⁷⁷

⁷² Fals-Borda, 'Comments on K. H. Silver's paper on "Continuity and change in Latin America: The university Student,"' (Paper at the Conference on Continuity and Social Change in Latin America, Committee on Latin American Studies, Arizona, 1963. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1442, Folder 8_90-91; 97.

⁷³ Joint Committee, 'Proceedings,' Box 1442, Folder 8_98.

⁷⁴ 'Dogmas No,' Fals Borda interviewed by *Revista Cromos*, No. 3817/18, (1991): 16.

⁷⁵ See footnote 56

⁷⁶ Students' letters to the Dean of the Faculty on 20 October 1967. ACH – UN, FA-FS, Box 1486, Folder 30_2.

⁷⁷ Fals-Borda, letter to the Dean of the Faculty on 17 October 1967. ACH – UN, FA-FS, Box 1486, Folder 30_1; Fals-Borda, 'Yo soy la contraparte de García Márquez,' interviewed by *Magazín Coralibe* (no date), 7-9. Cutting. ACH-UN, FOFB, Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Recortes_prensa_3_1.

In early 1968, after getting married to sociologist María Cristina Salazar, Fals-Borda was granted an *ad honorem* commission from the National University to attend academic commitments at University College, London.

Eventually, the commission was extended for another two years, 1969–1970, during which Fals-Borda worked as Programme Director of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development in Latin America, in Geneva.⁷⁸ He coordinated the research project on Cooperatives and Rural Development in Latin America (see next chapter). By 1970, his worries about the conflict with the Communists and reactionaries in 1967 seemed to have diminished — the Faculty of Sociology was expecting the ‘new Fals-Borda’; and he too was optimistic about the ‘new faculty’.⁷⁹ Due to commitments in Geneva, the return, expected in April, was postponed to June 1970.⁸⁰ However, in April 1970 Fals-Borda in his correspondence raised concerns about new drawbacks. As he wrote to Gunnar Myrdal: ‘There are grave internal problems at the university which are impeding effective work there as is unfortunately the case practically everywhere else in Latin America.’⁸¹

⁷⁸ Letter of appointment signed on 20 May 1968. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_285.

⁷⁹ ‘En Bogotá hubo consenso general en profesores, directivos y estudiantes en que debo regresar al Departamento de Sociología el año entrante ... con que me sorprendió mucho. Pero fue que se han convencido de que hay un ‘nuevo Fals-Borda’. Mi tesis sobre ‘crisis’ les gustó mucho, y si hubieras visto la procesión de gente de izquierda que vinieron a visitarme en Bogotá durante esos días, te hubieras vuelto verde (rojo) de la envidia.’ Fals-Borda, letter to José María Rojas Guerra from Geneva on 31 October 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_32. In his letter to Stanley Ross, Director Institute Latin American Studies, The University of Texas at Austin, on 30 October 1969, Fals-Borda wrote: ‘As you probably know, my present commission in Europa expires in March 1970, and I am now planning to return to my University in Bogotá. It seems that this department has now overcome its recent crisis ... with a chance to recuperate after the onslaught by the reactionaries in power.’ An optimistic Fals-Borda wrote to the Argentinian sociologist Juan F. Marsal on 3 November 1969: ‘Por fortuna [la Facultad] se está re-estructurando con mis alumnos que han vuelto con su PhD., y la crisis reciente se ha superado. Ahora hay que ayudarles a triunfar en esta nueva etapa.’ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_31; 37.

⁸⁰ Delays in the final report of his project at U.N. See, letters to José Rivero and Rudolf Leutz, Institute of International Solidarity Foundation Konrad Adenauer, Lima, Perú; Dieter Zachock, Director Economic Research Bureau State University of New York, on 26 January. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_164; 200.

⁸¹ Letter to Gunnar Myrdal, Institute for International Economic Studies, Stockholm, from Geneva on 30 April, ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suecia_44.

As it transpired, Fals-Borda's return to Colombia in 1970 was followed by his resignation from the National University. In his letter, published in the nationwide newspaper *El Tiempo*, Fals-Borda explained his motives: the new reforms meant a significant setback for a faculty which had been the stronghold of ideological and academic independence against attacks from political and religious vested interests since its foundation in 1959. Moreover, the process of systematic destruction of past achievements was accompanied by a campaign to discredit him. As Fals-Borda wrote:

Para tal efecto se ha utilizado al estudiantado manteniéndolo ignorante del pasado real de la Facultad y llevándolo a creer que está avanzando en el campo de la sociología. Es fácil demostrar esa equivocación y el efecto de los últimos esfuerzos de 're-estructuración' no pueden ser más desastrosos para los mismos estudiantes, para la Universidad y para el país. Se trata de una vuelta a la disquisición sin rigor, estilo del Siglo XVIII, que considera como único avance de la sociología moderna al funcionalismo cuyos modelos se habían empezado a descartar en la Facultad desde 1962 por inaplicables a la realidad colombiana. No estando de acuerdo con tal estado de cosas, y no queriendo ni necesitando ser partícipe de ese proceso de reversión —proceso que no está en mis manos detener ni aliviar— he decidido separarme de la Universidad. Hay mucho qué hacer por el país fuera del claustro universitario como para detenerse por estas circunstancias que limitan tan dolorosamente la función liberadora y de orientación popular de la Universidad Nacional (*El Tiempo*, 29 July 1970).

What is even more interesting about this letter is Fals-Borda's silence about the ideological and political reasons for totally disengaging himself from the academic establishment. A unique document for understanding his motivations is Fals-Borda's 'Memorandum', submitted to the Cuban authorities along with his application for a permit to visit the island.

In this 'Memorandum', written in Geneva on 16 May 1969, Fals-Borda set out what can now be regarded as an ideological synthesis of his reflection on subversion between 1967 and 1970. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the 'Memorandum' also defined the consistent ideological framework that guided Fals-Borda until his death in

2008. However, ‘it must be kept confidential,’ wrote Fals-Borda to Rafael Cepeda, ‘at least until I can clarify my views and discuss these issues at length in Cuba.’⁸²

Se trata, simplemente de un viaje de iniciación en la ruta revolucionaria, para aprender de las realizaciones cubanas actuales y pasadas. Estas constituyen un acervo de experiencias valiosísimas que ningún latinoamericano inteligente (y menos un profesor como yo) debe ignorar. Obviamente, allí hay pautas a seguir para nuestros pueblos oprimidos, alicientes que nos faltan en el resto de América Latina ... ¿Dónde más recibir inspiración sobre esta lucha que en Cuba? De allí mi interés de ir a *aprender*.⁸³ Creo que de este aprendizaje saldría reconfortado espiritualmente y listo a colaborar en las luchas más decisivas que las que he podido librar hasta ahora en mi país para buscar su real desarrollo.

Obviamente, esta línea implica oposición al gobierno del Frente Nacional en Colombia. Hice pública mi nueva posición el año antepasado, rechacé ofertas y tentaciones (las de estar en el poder), y ello me ha causado no pocos sinsabores. Uno de ellos es mi práctico alejamiento del país. Pero yo me he mantenido en comunicación, a través de mis libros y de cartas abiertas⁸⁴ que envió a grupos amigos. Pienso regresar a comienzos del año entrante (cuando termine mi contrato con este Instituto⁸⁵) y hay personas que piensan como yo y que esperan mi retorno para intensificar la acción. (Después de todo, yo no soy cualquier monigote en Colombia:⁸⁶ inmodestamente, creo que cuento con alguna “hinchada” y mis alumnos, colegas y amigos están dispersos por todo el país. Además, estoy identificado en política con Camilo Torres, cuyos seguidores, hoy desorganizados, subsisten en muchas partes a la espera de una mejor ocasión para hacerse presentes).⁸⁷ Claro que es una nueva línea política que sigo, y que creo se debe al impacto que sobre mí ha hecho Camilo Torres y su muerte en 1965.

... Yo mismo me he comprometido a trabajar con grupos activos colombianos que combaten el Frente Nacional ... Destaco, en fin, que mi interés actual sigue siendo mayormente uno de aprendizaje, de academia, de estudio, para prepararme mejor en lo que habrá de venir.⁸⁸

⁸² Fals-Borda, ‘Memorandum,’ Geneva on 16 May 1969 ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones Internacionales, sub-folder Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico_Cuba_20.

⁸³ Emphasis in the original. Fals-Borda, ‘Memorandum,’ 20.

⁸⁴ Four letters published in the newspaper *El Correo del Llano* during the first half of the year 1969. See footnote 96 below.

⁸⁵ United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva.

⁸⁶ Fals-Borda appeared to refer to *monigote* in the Colombian usage as puppet. It seemed he ignored the use of this word in Cuba: piece of wood used by the children to roll up the kite string. See DRAE, ‘Monigote,’ 2014.

⁸⁷ ‘Hinchada’: Followers, used mainly for football fans.

⁸⁸ Fals-Borda, ‘Memorandum,’ 20-21.

Fals-Borda visited Cuba in June that year for three weeks, during which he gave three lectures at the National Academy of Science and the University of Havana, and was invited again in October to deliver two courses on 'Política Rural en America Latina'.⁸⁹ He also returned in July 1970.⁹⁰ According to Fals-Borda and his wife, María Cristina: '[El viaje] constituyó una experiencia inolvidable y, en efecto, el haber entrado en contacto directo con la revolución cubana ya representa para nosotros una renovación intelectual y espiritual que nos venía haciendo falta.'⁹¹

Like many intellectuals and writers attracted by 'the Cuban Revolution's unorthodox exuberance', Fals-Borda's trip to Cuba was a sort of initiation in the revolutionary route.⁹² However, as will be seen later on, he was not attracted mainly by the culture of the 'heroic guerrilla'. Nor was he in search of revolutionary doctrine. As his 'Memorandum' expressed it, he wanted to learn from the Cuban model of revolutionary activism. Unlike Debray, who had assumed that guerrilla warfare was the only road to revolution in Latin America, Fals-Borda proposed a much broader strategy of subversion, in which guerrilla tactics and violence may be strategically necessary to accelerate change⁹³. Richard Shaull concluded that Debray and Fals-Borda

⁸⁹ Fals-Borda, letter to José María Rojas Guerra, from Geneva on 31 October 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_32.

⁹⁰ 'Letter to Erich Jacoby, Institute for International Economic Studies, Stockholm, on 9 July 1970. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suecia_67.

⁹¹ Letter to Le-Riverand on 16 July 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Bolivia,Cuba,Ecuador,Mexico_Cuba_20. In letter to Gilda Betancourt, Dean of the Faculty of Sociology of the University of La Havana, Fals-Borda asking her to send her comments on *Subversion and Social Change*, wrote in a tone of excitement, rather unusual in his letters: 'Mucho me agrada tener sus comentarios porque, como usted sabe, yo apenas me inicio en ese campo de la sociología del conflicto y de la revolución. Este proceso es el que quizás me hace tan sensible a los que ustedes están tratando de hacer, de crear, en el Departamento, y "daría un ojo de la cara" por poder participar en este esfuerzo creador.' Letter on 17 July 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Bolivia,Cuba,Ecuador,Mexico_Cuba_12.

⁹² Kepa Artaraz, *Cuba and Western Intellectual since 1959* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 4.

⁹³ Debray changed was arrested in Bolivia April 1969. He was convicted to thirty years in prison for being part of Ché Guevara group; however, after an international campaign led by Jean-Paul Sartre, André Malraux, General Charles de Gaulle and Pope Paul VI, Debray was released. He sought asylum in Chile, where he wrote *The Chilean Revolution* (1973), where he appreciated in a different light the revolutionary drive of socialism. He returned to Paris after President Salvador Allende was overthrown. See Artaraz, *Cuba and Western*, 190-210.

represented two different options: reliance on guerrilla warfare as the only option, or the organisation of an overall, long-term systematic effort to subvert the established order.’⁹⁴

Although Fals-Borda requested Rafael Cepeda to keep the reasons for his trip to Cuba confidential until he could visit Cuba, Fals-Borda’s ideological orientation had been instead widely discussed with his friends and even published in his four open letters sent from Geneva in early 1969.⁹⁵ As Fals-Borda wrote to one of his students of the National University who was finishing his PhD at Harvard University: ‘Tuve la gran oportunidad de venir a Europa para adquirir nuevas experiencias, embarcarme de lleno en estudios comparativos, y establecer contactos con el mundo revolucionario y socialista ... Regreso a Colombia con ánimos renovados y también quizás, con una nueva serenidad, sin compromisos con nadie, excepto con la tarea de la transformación social significativa que atañe a nuestra generación.’⁹⁶ To examine the ideological basis of the overall strategy is the aim of the next sections.

3.2. Camilo Torres’s pluralist utopia

In the fifth of seven comments that sociologist J. Silva Michelena made on the draft of *Subversion* (1967), he drew Fals-Borda’s attention to the chronic political incapability of subversive groups to achieve the utopia — a key aspect to consider in teletic sociological analysis. As explanation he suggested: ‘Los conservadores han tenido

⁹⁴ Richard Shaull, review of *Subversion and Social Change*, *NACLA Newsletter*, December (1967). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro Subversión_Colombia_121.

⁹⁵ Four letters published in the newspaper *El Correo del Llano*: ‘Carta de Ginebra,’ ‘Colombia Hipotecada,’ ‘¿Cómo son nuestros dirigentes?’ and ‘El compromiso con el Poder’. *El Correo del Llano* was a newspaper of small circulation. To his friend Armando Valenzuela, Fals-Borda wrote: ‘Claro que a mí personalmente me sirven las cartas como catarsis, y ellas hacen que me vaya alineando y que me vaya definiendo. Letter on 26 August 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Ginebra_Suiza_15.

⁹⁶ Fals-Borda’s letter to Samuel Yohai on 27 August 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_15.

siempre de su lado a la Iglesia que parece ser la única institución *bien organizada* en Colombia que no ha generado nunca disórrganos tan bien organizados que sean capaces de contrarrestarla.⁹⁷ Silva Michelena observed that more important than the church's direct intervention in politics had been the adoption of its values in key social groups such as the family and the schools which reinforced conservatism. Therefore: 'Este era uno de los factores que habían hecho de Camilo el líder ideal para Colombia, pero como tú has dicho, se le puede revivir y no es la primera vez que un muerto hace una revolución.'⁹⁸

If Fals-Borda regarded Camilo Torres as the standard-bearer of a new subversion in Colombia, it was not because Torres was a priest who preached revolution in evangelical tones. It was because both the moral direction of social change, and the key mechanisms of compulsion to impose it, converged at his pluralist utopia.⁹⁹

Fals-Borda's approach to Camilo Torres's positive ideological drive was an effort to rescue its utopian and moral ingredient from the interpretative dispute between those who underplayed the political significance of an 'immature' and 'defrocked priest' trapped in Marxist dialectics and those who made of him a mere justification of armed struggle.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Emphasis in the original. Letter to Fals-Borda from Jose A. Silva Michelena, on 10 January 1967. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro Subversión_Colombia_54.

⁹⁸ Jose A. Silva Michelena. Letter on 10 January 1967. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Libros, sub-folder Libro Subversión_Colombia_54.

⁹⁹ Fals-Borda analyses three mechanisms used by both traditional groups and by subversives who seek to impose their respective valued goals on the society, namely, political hegemony, leadership ability and social diffusion of rebel elements. This is one of the aspects of *Subversion*'s theoretical framework, through which Fals-Borda analyses the dialectical process of subverting a social order. He also identified stabilising factors that provide minimum durability for the valued elements gained in the transition from one order to another, and analysed mechanisms of adjustment by which subversions have been promoted or frustrated through co-optation, control over technology and economy and the use of violence and political hegemony. Fals-Borda, *Subversion*, 14-17; 170-172.

¹⁰⁰ *El Tiempo* and *El Siglo* headlines on 17 February 1966; *La Republica*, 18 February 1966; Vicente Andrade, 'Quién es responsable de la tragedia de Camilo Torres,' *Revista Javeriana*, vol. 65 (1966): 177-181.

Therefore, ‘revive Camilo,’ through a historic dialectic process, was quite different from the repetition of Camilo’s doctrine or the use of his memory to justify politics by violent means. Fals-Borda’s revival of Camilo Torres was a twofold process. On the one hand, it appropriated the critical element of his praxis: Camilo Torres’s pluralism did not mean a policy of tolerance ‘to live and let live.’ This, Torres argued, may be possible in countries where institutions guarantee social security independent of group political affiliation; however, in Colombia — a highly segregated society, split between the ruling oligarchy consisting of twenty-four families and the American monopolies for which these families work hand-in-glove, and the vast majority of Colombians living in poverty — pluralism had a different meaning.¹⁰¹ Pluralism was a practical form of criticism of political sectarianism, which had allowed the oligarchy to rule uncontested over a society torn apart. ‘Even after the ruling classes made a political alliance,’ wrote Camilo Torres, ‘*la Violencia* has been prolonged to ensure the continuation of the sectarianism necessary to prevent the parties and the state from being rebuilt in a more technical and rational way’.¹⁰² Camilo Torres’s pluralism therefore challenged the National Front’s ideology, phrased in terms of internal national security.

On the other hand, critical recovery of Camilo Torres’s pluralism meant de-spiritualising politics. Camilo Torres’s dialogue with the Marxists and the Communists challenged the ideological Manicheism, held by the church–state alliance, which had perceived all good on one side, and all evil on the other. Camilo Torres’s dialectics is no longer between good and

¹⁰¹ *La República*, 16 June 1965.

¹⁰² Camilo Torres, ‘Social Change and rural violence in Colombia,’ in *Revolutionary Priest*, 239. His attacks on the oligarchy were in at least three directions: first, to criticise the traditional ideological antagonism created by the two parties with the Church’s consent: ‘People are divided in groups that artificially oppose each other and fight among themselves over academic matters such as the immortality of the soul, while being distracted from making radical discoveries such as “hunger, yes, is mortal”.’ Second, as he noted in his message to workers, as the servants of the pattern of international capitalist development, from which oppression of the majorities became a way of life for the native oligarchies. ‘Join the workers,’ in *Revolutionary Priest*, 382–384. Third, as responsible for tyrannically maintaining a status quo that the masses do not support, which placed the grave moral responsibility of unleashing a bloody revolution on to them. ‘Message to the oligarchy,’ *Revolutionary Priest*, 421.

evil but between justice and dignity on one hand, and exploitation and oppression on the other. As Camilo Torres put it, when religion makes people take human problems seriously, it is no longer religious alienation. So in contrast to the dominant groups who blamed the socio-political turmoil on inimical outsiders or foreign conspiracies, mostly Communist, Torres declared: 'I am not, nor will I ever become, a Communist. However, I am prepared to fight together with the Communists for our common goals: against the oligarchy and the United States domination; for the winning of power by the people.'¹⁰³

Pluralism, as Fals-Borda pointed out, described Camilo Torres's efforts to put into political terms his principles of ecumenism and human dignity. It was both a response to the entrenched sectarianism that had characterised Colombian politics and a strategy of political participation to bind diverse groups together. Neither the Frente Unido's tactical errors nor Camilo Torres's self-deluding confidence in the immediate success of armed struggle stopped Fals-Borda from recognising Camilo Torres's pluralism in the guiding principles of his political praxis. Therefore, what Fals-Borda found contradictory was that Torres, a non-dogmatic intellectual and priest, had joined the rigid and dogmatic ELN guerrillas.¹⁰⁴ Thus, Camilo Torres's (and most Latin American subversives') ideological justification for joining the armed struggle was the point at which Fals-Borda's subversion departed, as will be examined in the next section.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Camilo Torres, 'Message to Communists,' in *Revolutionary Priest*, 371.

¹⁰⁴ Julio Cortés and Jaime Arenas, the two university leaders, and undercover guerrilla fighters, whose influence was decisive in Camilo Torres's decision to join the ELN guerrillas, were later executed by the guerrilla leadership. Fals-Borda's opinions about Camilo Torres's decision to join the guerrillas were summarised in an article he wrote for the 25th anniversary of Camilo Torres's death. He wrote: 'Apenas tuve dos veces la oportunidad de discutir a solas con Camilo sobre su vinculación con las guerrillas, y eso cuando él ya lo había decidido. No estuve de acuerdo con él, pero respeté su convicción, su fe altruista en la bondad final e intrínseca del cumplimiento de su deber como sacerdote y como colombiano en la lucha por la justicia social.' '¿Dónde estaría Camilo hoy?' *El Espectador, Magazín Dominical*, No. 408, 17 February 1991.

¹⁰⁵ Camilo Torres's justification of revolutionary violence: 'The economic, military, ecclesiastic, and political powers will wage war with the people in the face of the revolution which is approaching, a revolution which implies violence. But violence is not excluded from the Christian ethic, because if Christianity is concerned with eliminating the serious evils which we suffer and with saving us from the continuous violence in which we live without possible solution, the ethic is to be violent once and for all

3.3. Subversion: a (non)-ideological justification of violence

Fals-Borda's non-ideological justification of violence was considered one of the most heterodox elements of his praxis to the Marxist and revolutionary Latin American intellectuals of his time. This went in parallel with his idea that violence was not the main, let alone the only, means of revolution. This explains why the topic of the guerrilla warfare did not receive particular consideration in his writing on *Subversion*. Fals-Borda's criticism of Camilo Torres consisted in delineating a particular condition in which Torres's pluralist ideology of efficacious love appeared to concentrate in a single focal point, paraphrasing Benjamin, 'like those that have traditionally been found in the utopian images of the philosophers'.¹⁰⁶

The topic was first addressed by Fals-Borda in the articles: 'The significance of guerrilla warfare in Latin America,' (1968), and 'Subversion: a central concern,' (1969). There Fals-Borda considered guerrilla warfare as a 'social fact,' a fact that reflected the existence of acute social problems in the area but by no means new in the history of Latin America. What deserved attention, according to him, was the radical difference between previous expressions of rebellion (motivated by the need to achieve marginal change), and the new emerging rebel groups, which adopted a truly subversive stance derived from an ideological political commitment.¹⁰⁷ The ideological impact of utopian socialist ideology in the 1920s laid the groundwork for contemporary subversive action

in order to destroy the violence which the economic minorities exercise against the people' (*El Tiempo*, 16 June 1965).

¹⁰⁶ Walter Benjamin, The life of Students, in *Selected Writings 1913–1926*, vol. 1., ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), 37.

¹⁰⁷ Guerrillas have consistently appeared during periods of conflict in Latin America. There were guerrillas against the Spaniards during the wars of Independence, also during the civil wars of nineteenth century Colombia which sought 'transformations that can be tolerated by an established order without disrupting its fundamental values and norms. In fact, they were usually led by actual or potential *caudillos* (political chiefs) and therefore fitted within the traditional order of society without challenging it in any profound way.' Fals-Borda, 'The significance of guerrilla warfare in Latin America,' *Cross Currents*, vol. 18, no. 4 (1968): 451.

‘like the first workers’ unions, peasant leagues, student organisations, one or two counter-elites, and the guerrillas’.¹⁰⁸

In spite of rapidly spreading throughout Latin American countries, guerrilla warfare, Fals-Borda noted, could be a symptom of significant political transformation ‘only to the extent to which the guerrillas are elements in an overall strategy of social subversion and change in the area’.¹⁰⁹ For him, the problem of violence as *ultima ratio* or, in Marx’s words as ‘the midwife of history,’ was not so much in its justification as in the conditions and limitations of its use. Herein lies the basis of Fals-Borda’s criticism of those whose excessive reliance on military success led to blind duplication of the Sierra Maestra pattern in the early 1960s after the success of the Cuban Revolution.¹¹⁰

The case of Father Camilo Torres illustrates this point. For him, justification of violent means was at the centre of his activity as political agitator. He formulated this justification in religious terms: violent revolution was the means to bring about a government that feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, teaches the ignorant, puts into practice the works of charity, and love for the neighbour, not just every now and then, and not just for a few, but for the majority of our neighbours.¹¹¹ For Camilo Torres, joining the guerrillas in October 1965 was a consolidation of his previous political work as a leader of the Frente Unido, whose platform he had launched in May 1965. In his last letter to his brother Fernando, written from his guerrilla campsite in the mountains

¹⁰⁸ Fals-Borda, ‘The significance of guerrilla,’ 453.

¹⁰⁹ Fals-Borda, ‘The significance of guerrilla,’ 452

¹¹⁰ This may explain why guerrillas have come to experience a situation of limited action and effectiveness and also why the original leadership of the first wave of guerrillas was annihilated: ‘The poor physical condition and immaturity of well-meaning university students hampered guerrilla activity in Venezuela and other countries; necessary peasant response and empathy were apparently not weighed properly by Guevara in Bolivia; the ripeness of political conditions in Colombia did not seem to be accurately gauged by Father Torres, who thereby was induced to risk himself in excessive daring; and the aloofness of regular army soldiers in Peru was overrated by Blanco. Meanwhile, subversive efforts were infiltrated by some opportunists and revanchists who cashed in on the financial aid, exploited supporters, or otherwise discredited the drives organised by rebel groups.’ Fals-Borda, ‘The significance of guerrilla,’ 457.

¹¹¹ Camilo Torres, ‘Revolution Christian Imperative,’ in *Revolutionary Priest*, 262.

of Santander, Camilo Torres wrote: ‘Después de la labor de agitación esta etapa es la obligada y la que va a consolidar la anterior. Estoy dispuesto a una lucha prolongada pero seguro del triunfo ... Si me quedo por el camino, porque me eliminan, creo que ya la labor hecha perdurará.’¹¹²

For Fals-Borda this was Camilo Torres’s tactical error. The embers of the pluralist subversion were kept alive only by reduced political and intellectual circles, and hence the objective conditions for a ‘popular counter-elite’ — a crucial element of the neo-socialist utopia — were almost non-existent.¹¹³ What deeply concerned Fals-Borda was the ‘overall strategy,’ that would accompany and make the efforts of such rebellious groups effective.

There is no doubt that Fals-Borda, in contrast to his former attempts at reformist policies, endorsed the view that only a revolutionary movement would make a historic transition possible. As he wrote, the new socialism in Latin America ‘does not hesitate to recognise the important need for just rebellion and it rationally includes counter-violence within plans and projects as part of its political strategy’.¹¹⁴ However, violence still remained for him a problem of strategy since it might serve as a catalyst for the masses just as it might alienate them. Therefore, dwelling primarily on ideological justifications, whether they come from religious, metaphysical or materialist standpoints, is to ignore the necessity of objective conditions for subversion over ideological principles or ideals. Consequently, Fals-Borda spared himself the need to resort to positive argument for the use of subversive violence: ‘It is impossible to enter here into the polemic over the justification of the use of violence, which has been going

¹¹² Camilo Torres’s handwritten letter to Fernando Torres, on 29 November 1965, ACH-UN, Fondo Camilo Torres Restrepo, Documento 81.

¹¹³ Fals-Borda, *Subversion*, 169.

¹¹⁴ Fals-Borda, *Subversion*, 171.

for several centuries ... Nor is it necessary to turn to the classical thesis of Saint Thomas Aquinas concerning the just war, even though it is important to recall the way in which it was revived in the sixteenth century to legitimise the Spanish conquest'.¹¹⁵

Fals-Borda's non-ideological justification of subversion did not eliminate the troubling philosophical and theological question posed by Christian priests advocating violence, or even more, resorting to it, as it was discussed in Chapter 4. What is noteworthy at this point is that Fals-Borda's *Subversion*, more than an epistemological rupture, as a number of his critics argue, was the articulation of a non-orthodox sociological framework within which he combined theoretical knowledge and historical research with valued political ideology.¹¹⁶ In a letter, written from Geneva, to his friends and colleagues in Colombia, reflecting on the role of Torres's legacy in the creation of the overall strategy of subversion, Fals-Borda commented:

El papel histórico de Camilo [Torres] va a dar lugar a un sinnúmero de controversias. Creo que no se gana nada con tener complejos de culpa sobre si fuimos o no lo suficientemente firmes o leales con él. Su función fue extraordinaria y única y la frase 'hasta las últimas consecuencias' no tiene sentido sino en él. Los otros que le siguieron a la guerrilla, como saben, ahora están siendo víctimas de un feroz canibalismo interno. ¿Son estas las últimas consecuencias de que hablaba Camilo? Algo está yendo mal, entonces, e imitar a Camilo ahora sería buscar nuevas vertientes y abrir nuevas posibilidades para la acción que aquellas que utilizó o que servirían en otros años. Por eso cabe saber discriminar entre las posibles rutas a seguir, para no servir a cualquier grupo ... sino a aquel que responda a nuestro ideal de servicio. Estoy seguro que esto vendrá. Tengan un poquito más de paciencia. Así la 'utilización' de Camilo debe quedar condicionada a estos grupos claves, estratégicos y decisivos, y nuestra tarea inmediata estaría en buscar y ayudar a tales grupos y luego en colaborar con ellos en la tarea concreta revolucionaria.¹¹⁷

Two weeks later, the addressees of this letter, and another twelve scholars, received another letter from Fals-Borda and his wife, Maria Cristina, inviting them to participate

¹¹⁵ Fals-Borda, *Subversion*, 166.

¹¹⁶ See Chapter 1, introduction and footnotes 4–7.

¹¹⁷ Fals-Borda's letter from Geneva to Carlos and Cecilia Castillo on 18 July 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Ginebra_Suiza_18.

in the creation of an independent centre of social and historical research, the topic of the next chapter.

With the benefit of hindsight

In his review of Fals-Borda's *Subversion*, M. Richardson argued that the book, in spite of having those qualities 'expected from this prominent Colombian sociologist,' contained fiery predictions in the last chapter that 'would make squirm those of us who continue to value humor and skepticism over fervent moral indignation'.¹¹⁸ Richardson was referring to Fals-Borda's observations about the intensification of the internal conflict in the light of the of the National Front's failure to tackle crucial social issues.¹¹⁹ Fatalistic as they were, Fals-Borda's predictions seriously underestimated the prospects of the armed conflict in Colombia.¹²⁰ So with the benefit of hindsight one would say such prophecies were realistic.

If both LVC (1962) and *Subversion* (1967), were written originally with the sense of urgency, as has been mentioned above, the new editions of both in 2005 and 2008, respectively, responded to the same need for understanding a new wave of massive annihilation deployed by military and para-military forces indiscriminately against revolutionary armed groups and social movements, Human Rights defenders and NGO's during the Democratic Security policy of the executive administration, 2002–

¹¹⁸ Miles Richardson, review of *Subversion*, 868.

¹¹⁹ 'The incongruities of the liberal-bourgeois order, underscored by election abstention and the repeated economic and political crisis, may accumulate so rapidly that they demand a total revision in political rules (...) The result of the existence of a power vacuum¹¹⁹ can be anticipated. When there is no other hope left for the dominant classes except the support of armed force, the people-antipeople confrontation is produced.' Fals-Borda, *Subversion*, 177.

¹²⁰ According to figures from the report issued by the Centre dedicated to the 'Recovery of historical memory,' from 1958 to 2012: 218,094 people were killed (81% were civilians), 25,007 people were disappeared, 1,982 massacres were officially reported, 2,119 people were killed by anti-personnel mines and 8,070 have been badly injured, 5,156 people, most of them children, have been illegally recruited, and 5,712,506 people have been displaced by force.

2010. The war cry of: 'Leave nothing, not even the seed,' that had unleashed *la Violencia*, had been repeated after the intensification of the conflict between guerrilla groups and the new *Pájaros* and *Chulavitas*, now called paramilitaries, which had been on the loose with the consent of the executive and members of the National Congress.¹²¹

In 2007 after what Fals-Borda called a 'resurrection', he devoted his 'extra time' to revising and updating the original version of *Subversion*.¹²² He concluded that the dialectical approach to Colombian history he had articulated in 1967 was still accurate and relevant. The book was re-edited and published in 2008 leaving the historical analysis almost intact. As he recalled: 'Cuando leí los capítulos analíticos quedé asombrado: había olvidado los detalles de aquella construcción intelectual. La lectura no me conmovió tanto por el método de análisis cuanto por los horizontes que proyectaba. Era ortodoxia con profecía. Y caí en la idea de reeditar.'¹²³

Fals-Borda's labour as dialectic historian did not conclude with his *Subversion*. His subsequent works dug deeper in search of vestiges of the socialist utopia in the different regions and communities where he had worked, as will be discussed in the closing chapter. Fals-Borda did not attempt to capture 'the truth of the past'. By challenging the idea that 'a nation always gets the government it deserves', his historic dialectic sought to contest so many fossilised political myths that made radical social change unthinkable and hence to lay the historical foundation for an ideology of ethical-political action.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Fals-Borda, *Antología* (2009), 467-469.

¹²² In 2006 he was declared dead after a respiratory collapse caused by severe pneumonia caught at a public demonstration of the political party Polo Democrático Alternativo, of which he was executive director. However, his niece, a doctor, who checked his body after it had been left in the mortuary, realised he still had some vital signs and resuscitated him. According to Fals-Borda, it was the spare time he needed to update and edit his first version of *Subversion* (1967). He died after the book was published in 2008. Víctor Manuel Moncayo, introduction to *Antología*, by Fals-Borda (Bogotá: CLACSO, 2009), 11.

¹²³ Fals-Borda, *Antología* (2009), 439.

¹²⁴ Originally: Every nation gets the government it deserves, attributed to Joseph de Maistre, one of France's early radical counter-revolutionaries.

Chapter Six

Participation and Action Research:

The Epistemological Bases of Fals-Borda's Socio-Political Praxis

At the award ceremonies of both the Malinowski and Martin Diskin prizes, which Fals-Borda received in 2007 and 2008, respectively, Fals-Borda emphasised that 'engagement' and 'commitment' were fundamental to his definition of 'participation', which became the cornerstone of his social research method known as Participatory Action Research (PAR).¹

Although these three words seem to be inextricably intertwined in Fals-Borda's praxis — to the point that some critics treat them as synonyms of each other — they reflect the evolution of the theoretical and methodological basis of PAR, 'a more complex level of academic, social and political participation'.² In the early 1970s Action Research was a widely-used method that had many interpretations. Only some ten years later did Fals-Borda refine what he called PAR. This process ranged from participant observation ('engagement') during his initial research with the community of Saucío, 1949–1952 (see Chapter 2), through 'commitment', which Fals-Borda spearheaded at the Latin American Conference of Sociology in Mexico, 1969, to the methodological and philosophical re-definition of 'participation', which became the critical aspect of his PAR in the early 1980s.

¹ Malinowski prize from the Society of Applied Anthropology of the United States and its journal *Human Organisation*. Selected as the Martin Diskin Oxfam American Commemorative Conference Speaker of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA).

² Fals-Borda, 'Action Research in the Convergence of Disciplines,' (Conference speech delivered at the Martin Diskin Oxfam American Commemorative Conference, LASA 2007), in *International Journal of Action Research*, vol. 9 no. 2 (2013): 156.

A key element in understanding this process is the point from which Fals-Borda departed in 1969. As Programme Director of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Fals-Borda's final report of the research project on 'Cooperatives and Rural Development in Latin America' details specific ways in which rural cooperatives have failed in action. Cooperatives in Latin America, many of which Fals-Borda helped establish in Colombia as advisor of the National Institute for Agrarian Reform (INCORA), were proposed as a 'third way' between capitalism and socialism; however, cooperatives as conceived and evolved in Europe, Fals-Borda argued, have not fitted the Latin American rural circumstances.³ Under control of patron-client based politics in rural Latin America, cooperatives have promoted marginal changes such as diffusing modern technology rather than being true instruments of socio-economic transformation. Cooperatives' failure in creating a network of self-supporting relations, broadening the political and civic consciousness of their members and liberating them from traditional exploitation, suggested that more dynamic forms of rural action may thus become necessary: Something like the *Ligas Camponesas* of North-East Brazil where peasants were involved in their conception and strategy.⁴ Moreover, according to Fals-Borda, such a process was political, and not only economic and social: 'It involves breaking the rule of "neutrality" of cooperative action, in order to engage the peasantry as a social class in structural conflict and change on behalf of their legitimate interests.'⁵

³ Fals-Borda's report was written in 1969. *Cooperatives and Rural Development in Latin America. An Analytical Report* (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), 1971), 143.

⁴ Fals-Borda, *Cooperatives*, 144-145. When the report was published, the Joint Committee for the promotion of Aid to Cooperatives, United Nations and World Council of Credit Unions (COPAC) disagree with it. However, in 1975, in a letter with regard the publication of the Volume III of Fals-Borda's research on cooperatives, Donald V. McGranahan, Director United Nations Research Institute for social Development, wrote: 'I think the report will have effects ... [COPAC], in response to our project, is now making a serious effort to review cooperative policy, in spite of earlier protests'. Letter on 3 September 1975. Archivo Central e Histórico, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Fondo Orlando Fals-Borda (ACH-UN, FOFB). Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_218.

⁵ Fals-Borda, *Cooperatives*, 146.

Against this background, this chapter analyses the epistemological journey undertaken by Fals-Borda between 1969 and 1974. As this chapter argues, what made Fals-Borda's redefinition of 'participation' one of the foundations of his critique of ideology was not only the epistemological validation of his method but also the ontological re-definition of 'participation' — from which Fals-Borda claimed PAR was not merely a method of social research but also a philosophy of life.

This chapter is divided into four sections. Sections 1–3 bring evidence that questions respectively three misconceptions widely accepted with regard to Fals-Borda's intellectual career during the period this chapter analyses: 1969–1974:

- 1) The first section sheds new light on the origins of Fals-Borda's independent centre of research, the Rosca Foundation.
- 2) The second examines the academic context in which Fals-Borda developed his ideas on Action Research, which in turn contest the idea that Fals-Borda's resignation from the National University in 1970 resulted in a radical change of his audience or abandonment of an institutional frame for his scholarship.
- 3) The third section looks at the process leading to the establishment of PAR in the early 1980s, which contradicts the version that PAR was mainly the result of Fals-Borda's praxis with the peasant movement and thus it was established by the International Symposium in Cartagena on Action Research, 1977.
- 4) Section four analyses, based also on primary information, the process leading Fals-Borda to define 'participation' as key element of his method of Action Research.

The chapter is based on Fals-Borda's correspondence during the period 1967–1977, available at the Fondo Orlando Fals-Borda of the Central and Historical Archive of the National University, Colombia. Dispersed in a large number of folders, under various labels, Fals-Borda's correspondence makes up an impressive collection of letters from

and to addressees in twenty-six countries. The analysis of this correspondence for this thesis has allowed the re-creation of the intellectual context in which he was immersed. To clarify or complement some issues relating to this period, further previously unresearched letters from 1978 to 1985 and from the Fondo Acumulado Faculty of Sociology of the National University, as well as primary and secondary bibliography, were also checked.

It is important to mention that this chapter does not analyse the contribution of other members of the Rosca Foundation in the methodological and ideological development of PAR. However, material available at the Fondo Orlando Fals-Borda, such as accounts and evaluations of the experiences of Victor Bonilla and Castillo-Cárdenas with the indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities in the state of Cauca, and Carlos Duplat with popular theatre in underprivileged areas of Bogotá, provided the author of this thesis with insightful testimonies about the spirit of the Rosca Foundation.⁶

⁶ Víctor Bonilla's work with the indigenous communities of the South of the country started when the *Paez* community, their land threatened by powerful landowners in the early 1970s, asked a Rosca researcher to check their land's title deeds. Later the community asked for their elders' accounts of *la Violencia* to be noted down so that they would have a written record of their earlier grievances. The break with the hegemonic ideology, as Bonilla observed, was not only possible through the critical observation of their reality as a resulting effect of a long-term process of oppression. It was also necessary to question the ways the members of the community themselves reinforce such colonialist perception. In 1977, after a process of research with the community, *Historia política de los Paéces* was published. Rather than an end, such history was a beginning: the narrative of 'el país Páez' (Páez country), courageously defended by their forebears, still lacked material basis. Not until the community asked for a map appropriately illustrated, the *apropiación igualitaria* (egalitarian appropriation) occurred. The experience, as V. Bonilla concluded, gave him a different way of theorising reality: 'El derecho a la territorialidad Páez surgía con toda su fuerza al ver las montañas y el pueblo dibujado en el mapa'. Víctor Bonilla, 'Experiencias de Investigación-Educación en comunidades Paéces. Mapas Parlantes,' (II congreso de Antropología, Medellín, October 1980). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_Orígenes_102-118. Duplat's project allowing workers to act, direct and create plays for their own communities. Evaluation and analysis of the impact of the Grupo Obrero de Teatro upon local communities, 1971. See also evaluation of a play on coffee production commissioned by the National Federation of Coffee Growers. Evaluation of the process of creation of other plays such as: 'La justicia al revés', 'Las desventuras de Cosiaco', 'Camino a la perdición' written, acted, discussed with the audience and then adapted or modified. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_20-62.

1. The establishment of the Rosca Foundation and the peasant movement

1.1. The origins of the Rosca Foundation⁷

It has been assumed, based on information from Ernesto Parra (1983) and Rojas Guerra (2010), that the Rosca Foundation sprang from a fortuitous encounter between Fals-Borda and the Presbyterian ministers Augusto Libreros and Gonzalo Castillo in Geneva in July 1970.⁸ This can also be read in the prologue to an Anthology of Fals-Borda's works, written by J. M. Rojas Guerra:

La Fundación La Rosca había surgido de un encuentro fortuito de [Fals-Borda] con Gonzalo Castillo y Augusto Libreros el 6 de julio de 1970 en Ginebra, cuando acordaron crear un Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Nacional que quedó formalizado meses después en Bogotá con el nombre de La Rosca de Investigación y Acción Social.⁹

Pérez Benavides, who interviewed Gonzalo Castillo, dated this accidental meeting to 1969.¹⁰ However, evidence in Fals-Borda's correspondence between 1968–1970 shows that the Rosca Foundation was far from being the result of a casual encounter.

In July 1969, Fals-Borda wrote a letter (personal and confidential) to August Vanistendael, inquiring about how favourably European institutions viewed development assistance in Latin America to support social and economic change. 'This is important,' Fals-Borda wrote, 'on behalf of certain friends and colleagues in Colombia who would be under the category of "key" or "strategic" groups for present and future political action.'¹¹ By this time, Fals-Borda and his wife, the sociologist

⁷ 'Rosca' means circle in Catalan. It was meant to challenge its pejorative meaning in Colombia: 'Clique'. ACH-UN, FOFB-Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_7.

⁸ Parra, *La Investigación-Acción*, 16; Rojas Guerra, prologue, xxxvi.

⁹ Rojas Guerra, introduction to *Antología*, by Fals-Borda (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional, 2010), xxxvi.

¹⁰ Pérez Benavides, *La influencia religiosa*, 62.

¹¹ Letter to August Vanistendael, Secretary-General, International Alliance of Catholic Development Agencies (CIDSE), Brussels, Belgium, on 23 July 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_Norteamérica/Belgica_04.

Maria Cristina Salazar, had drafted a proposal for the project ‘Centre for Study of the National Reality’, expected to open between April and December 1970.¹² The draft project was confidentially sent to a small group of friends on 27 July 1969.¹³ Responses from Tomás Ducay, Carlos and Cecilia Castillo (which cannot be analysed thoroughly here) indicate that the proposal was received with deep reservations.¹⁴

In early 1970 Fals-Borda took this task one step forward — he initiated formal conversations with people and institutions within his network about real possibilities for financial support to create an independent centre of research.¹⁵ In a letter to Gunnar Myrdal, he wrote: ‘I spoke about this confidentially with Dr Jacoby, to whom I explained the initiative of creating a new “Centre for Study of the National Reality” in Bogotá ... I feel very much the urgency of international support for this venture, and that of Swedish institutions is uppermost.’¹⁶ In spite of the unenthusiastic responses

¹² As the letter read, the purpose was to set: un hogar intelectual en el que podamos actuar según nuestras convicciones, divulgar el resultado de nuestras investigaciones e irradiar nuestras ideas y justificadas preocupaciones sociales y políticas’. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder F_R/R_I_AS_9.

¹³ Tomás Ducay, Enrique Valencia, Carlos y Cecilia Castillo, Gonzalo Hernández, Humberto Rojas, Rodrigo Parra, Álvaro y Nora Camacho, Gonzalo Castillo, Carlos Escalante, Fernando Uricoechea, Romuldas Sviedrys, Oscar Delgado.

¹⁴ Ducay replied on 7 Sept 1969: ‘No sé si en los largos días del exilio ginebrino han ido madurando otras decisiones distintas de las científicas.’ ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_14. Carlos Castillo’s long letter listed ideological and practical problems. He concluded that Fals-Borda should ‘sleep on it’. Letter from Ithaca 2 August 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_17-20. Cecilia Castillo, Carlos’s wife, wrote: Es necesario reconocer que, en la universidad, algunos de nosotros, especialmente todos aquellos que son identificados como *falsistas*, somos personas no deseables ... Este es otro punto en favor de abrir una fuente de trabajo. Este centro podría ser algo como el Instituto Di Tella en Buenos Aires. Un sitio donde pueden trabajar, buenos profesionales, que por razones políticas son expulsados u obligados a retirarse de las organizaciones estatales ... Cada uno de nosotros puede ser activista. Pero la institución a mí me parece que no debe orientarse fundamentalmente en la dirección del activismo político.’ Letter from Ithaca 2 August 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_20-22.

¹⁵ In April 1970 Fals-Borda was invited to a series of academic discussions in Sweden: Magnus Morner invited him to lecture at the Institute for Ibero-American Studies, University of Stockholm. Erich Jacoby and Gunnar Myrdal to lecture at the Institute for International Economic Studies, Wenner-Gren Centre (IIES, WGC), Stockholm. A third invitation came from the Swedish International Development Agency to lead a conference on ‘Rural institutions and planned change’. He was also contacted by the Tollare Group, a group of ten youngsters interested in problems of development and agrarian reform in Colombia and planning to go to Colombia to volunteer in rural areas on productive projects. Letter from Gunilla Hogling on 14 April 1970. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suecia_41; 44-45; 56.

¹⁶ Fals-Borda’s letter to Erich Jacoby, IIES, WGC, Stockholm, on 30 April 1970. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suecia_46-47. Fals-Borda’s letter to Gunnar Myrdal, IIES, WGC, Stockholm, on 30 April 1970. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suecia_44.

received from some of those consulted about the project, Fals-Borda and his wife wrote with a great sense of optimism: 'It is expected that at least a dozen social scientists will join the Centre ... They are ready to combine theory and practice, to leave ivory towers, and make an attempt to organize an autonomous school of thought in response to Latin American problems.'¹⁷ The centre, as they put it, was designed to both recapture 'the mystique of service to society' that characterised the School of Sociology of the National University' and re-established the programme to support the professional training of sociologists and other social scientists in Latin America.¹⁸ The latter was the Programa Latinoamericano de Estudios del Desarrollo (PLEDES) which Fals-Borda created in 1964. In a letter to Donald Sandberg, Ford Foundation, about renewing an important grant for the Faculty of Sociology, Fals-Borda wrote about PLEDES: 'This is a most important project to which I will be proud and happy to belong.'¹⁹ But it did not last long; after the reform of the Faculty of Sociology in 1968, PLEDES was closed.

In the proposal of the new centre, Fals-Borda strongly lamented the closure of PLEDES and the dismissal of international scholars, after which, Fals-Borda stated, academic quality and commitment were seriously compromised: 'It practically means that a ten-year effort may have come to naught'. And he concluded: 'This is even more tragic when one examines the urgent need to articulate responsible answers for political and economic problems; answers which could be produced by a team of social scientists committed to profound and significant change, like those who are now being displaced.'²⁰

¹⁷ Fals-Borda, 'Project Centre of Study of the National Reality: Background Information. May 1970. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_04.

¹⁸ Fals-Borda, 'Project Centre of Study.' ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_03.

¹⁹ Letter from Fals-Borda on 17 March 1966 to Donald Sandberg, the Ford Foundation. Archivo Central e Histórico, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Fondo Acumulado Facultad de Sociología (ACH-UN, FAFS), Box 1415, Folder 6_3.

²⁰ Fals-Borda, 'Project Centre of Study.' ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_04. J. M. Rojas Guerra remembered it as a regressive reform. Under the direction of Dario Mesa, the Faculty

By the beginning of 1970 the proposal for the creation of an independent centre had gained much ground, and Fals-Borda considered different ways in which the Centre could maintain formal and informal contact with the Faculty of Human Sciences at the National University with the aim to ‘transfer into [the Faculty] new vitality so that it would regain its efficacy and drive,’ which meant that the Centre might have only ‘a limited period of life but with considerable consequences.’²¹ This caveat, introduced at the end of the project, not only reflected Fals-Borda’s hopes of returning to the faculty he founded but also the fact that most of the scholars he invited seemed cautious about joining his project of a new independent centre.

When Fals-Borda met Castillo and Libreros in Geneva in 1970, Fals-Borda had already obtained significant financial support and hence it was formalized on 6 November 1970, shortly after his return to Colombia. The name Rosca de Investigación y Acción Social was agreed only just before the foundation regulations were approved, and interestingly, none of those initially invited took part in the creation of the foundation.

1.2. The Rosca and the peasant movement

The Rosca Foundation’s aims were basically the same as those for the Centre for the Study of National Reality in July 1969.²² However, the most important difference between the original project, conceived as a centre of collaborative social research in Bogotá, and the Rosca Foundation, was the latter’s involvement with the peasant struggle for land. As a preliminary survey carried out by the Rosca members had shown: ‘The chief problem of the Colombian peasant is that of powerlessness. He does

abandoned empirical research and focused on teaching in the classroom. See Rojas Guerra, introduction, xxvii, footnote 22.

²¹ Fals-Borda, ‘Project Centre of Study.’ ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_04.

²² Letter on 27 July 1969 and ‘Rosca de Investigación y Acción Social,’ 14 November 1970. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_04-08; 09-11.

not have the resources or organization with which he can improve his economic or educational conditions. His life is a dreary cycle of impoverishment, indebtedness and unemployment, with minimal control over land.²³

In accord with his views, expressed in the final report of the research project on cooperatives for the UNIRID, Fals-Borda, as director of the Rosca Foundation, set his base in the western plains of the Atlantic Coast, where the struggle of smallholders and land-workers against large landowners was more intense, and had major impact in terms of land distribution. As will be discussed further in section 4, the elected president of Colombia in 1970, Misael Pastrana, abruptly dismantled the official machinery that had been set up by the former administration to carry out an ambitious agrarian reform. By 1972, when Fals-Borda joined the struggle, the goals of the National Association of Peasants (ANUC) were already being subverted by outside political interests. Thus, the struggle of the peasant movement inevitably became the field of ideological struggle of dogmatic Marxists, pro-soviet Communists, pro-Cuban Maoists, Socialists and the official line which represented the interests of big landowners. This was the field of action of the newly created Rosca Foundation, whose programme was redefined in the following terms:

The proposal of Rosca included the recruitment of trained volunteers who would leave their university and professional jobs and go into the barrios and ghettos to work with the peons, Indians, and negroes. Their work would include helping to clarify land titles, to develop a voice for the people in their own land, to organize them in demanding fair wages, profit sharing, land ownership and better educational opportunities. Teams would work with peasant organisations in rural areas, with Indian civil rights campaigners, labor unions in the city, basic community organisations and would develop adult education (basic education and literacy). Yet more ambitious goals were agrarian reform, publications by the people themselves, and new forms of economic and social relationships between the poor and others ... In every instance, it is the dream that legal and non-

²³ Fals-Borda, 'Information concerning the Rosca project of Colombia,' 20 April 1972. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_126.

violent methods can be adopted and used widely before the desperation that the people experience deepens into more drastic and destructive actions.²⁴

Fals-Borda not only joined the peasant invasion of land, for which he ended up in jail with many others, but established himself as an intellectual of the peasant movement. However, his contribution was much more than intellectual since he initially obtained important financial support from the Presbyterian Church of the U.S., which revived the accusation from radical leftists that he was an agent of the CIA. The Presbyterian Colombian Synod also cried out against the U.S. Church's funding the Rosca Foundation, 'a Communist revolutionary organisation dedicated to promote class struggle'.²⁵ The local Synod formally protested against such an undue interference in national affairs and demanded the U.S. church revoke its decision. A second instalment of US \$75,000 due for early 1974 was suspended, which did not prevent Fals-Borda from being excommunicated on the basis of his alleged communism.²⁶ Fals-Borda found an alternative and generous source of financial support in the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA).²⁷

Fals-Borda's work in the plains of the Atlantic Coast during the time of the Rosca Foundation provides a background to another struggle: the epistemological one. As this chapter argues, this development was as crucial as his involvement with the peasant

²⁴ Fals-Borda, 'Information concerning,' ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_127.

²⁵ The Rosca Foundation received a grant in 1970 from the Presbyterian Church in the U.S., the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and the World Council of Churches totaling US \$12,000 to make a preliminary survey and formulate a proposal for programme and action. Fals-Borda, 'Information concerning the Rosca project of Colombia,' 20 April, 1972. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Investigación_Acción_Participativa (IAP), sub-folder Fundación_Rosca/Rosca_Investigación_Acción_Social (FR/RIAS)_126.

²⁶ On 27 January 1973, the National Committee on the Self-Development of People of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (NCSDP) approved a grant of US \$75,000 for the Rosca Foundation, of which a first instalment of US \$25,000 was deposited into the foundation account in New York on 5 Feb 1973. The second deposit of US \$50,000 was made on 14 May 1973. See confirmation letter to Paul Epps on 19 February 1973. Letter from Christina Bellamy (NCSDP), on May 31 1973. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_119; 123.

²⁷ SIDA supported the Rosca Foundation's project *Cordoba-Sucre-Antioquia-Sevilla* for a total of 500,000 Swedish Crowns (SEK) equivalent to US \$112,020, transferred in two remittances (30 January and 4 December 1974). On 6 August 1975, the Rosca Foundation received another grant of 520,000 SEK for the project *Cali-Buenaventura-Boyacá* coordinated by the Pacific Association. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Correspondencia_Internacional, sub-folder Suecia_1976_001-007.

movement for the theoretical and methodological validation of PAR, as will be explained in the next two sections.

2. Intellectual Context: From Mexico (1969) to Toronto (1974)

The idea that instead of scholars and intellectuals, 'Fals-Borda's new interlocutors and judges were peasants hardly able to read or write' is a misrepresentation.²⁸ Certainly the challenge for Fals-Borda, after his involvement with the peasant movement, was to find suitable ways to communicate with the peasants; however, this must not underplay Fals-Borda's significant contribution in building up an international network of social researchers. These efforts, which ran simultaneously with his work at the Rosca Foundation, provided him with an unparalleled milieu for debate, collaborative work and encouraging external criticism, which, as this chapter argues, were crucial for the theoretical and methodological developments that converged in PAR.

Contrary to Cataños's opinion, Fals-Borda's readers and critics were not only peasants but also the Latin American sociologists, anthropologists, pedagogists, theologians and a large group of U.S., European and Asian scholars. He also actively engaged in intellectual debates which were crucial when sociology, as discipline, was in its making in Latin America. Only at the end of WWII, and especially at the late 1950s, with the economic, political and ideological influences of the US felt within the region, did the social sciences, sociology in particular, become autonomous disciplines.²⁹ In fact, the

²⁸ Gonzalo Cataño et al., ed. *Sociología y compromiso: en torno a la obra de Orlando Fals-Borda*, (Bogotá: Asociación Colombiana de Sociología, 1987), 20. In the re-edited (shortened) version of his introduction, Cataño replaced this sentence with: 'El público integrado por estudiantes y profesores fue relevado por campesinos, sindicatos y partidos de izquierda,' a change in form not content. 'Ciencia y compromiso,' *Revista de Economía institucional Universidad Externado de Colombia*, vol. 10, n. 19 (2008): 88.

²⁹ The creation of programmes of professional sociology throughout Latin America coincided with the Andean Pact of 1961 which started the First Decade of Development established as part of the Alliance for Progress: a reformist regional programme, to deal with both the insurgency outbreaks, after the Cuban

first professional programme of Sociology in Latin America was the school, attached to the Faculty of Economics, founded by Fals-Borda and Camilo Torres in 1959. Before this, Sociology's academic institutionalization took place in terms of the so-called *Sociologia de Cátedra*, that is, as part of other disciplines, mainly philosophy, education and law. Therefore, structural-functionalism was more than a trend: it represented the theoretical and methodological birthplace of professional social sciences in Latin America. For all its shortcomings, structural-functionalism (which demanded validity and reliability similar to those of the exact natural sciences) transformed Latin American sociology into a statistically and methodologically valid subject. Until then it had been stagnating, based on speculation.³⁰

However, soon after it was established, bias-free social science clashed with some native social scientists, aware of the appalling conditions of workers, the rural population and slum-dwellers.³¹

In 1971, the Brazilian sociologist Fernando Henrique Cardoso, later President of his country, 1995–2003, declared: ‘The intellectuals in Latin America are the voice of those who cannot speak for themselves.’³² Independent centres of social research, parallel to those recently established in the universities, were the response to empiricist research

Revolution, and the need to expand US regional investments. See Falabella Gonzalo, ‘Highlights of the Development of Participatory Research in Latin America,’ 64. (Monograph, Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London. Copy sent by Falabella to Fals-Borda asking for his comments). Copy with Fals-Borda’s hand-written comments. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Inglaterra_62-94.

³⁰ Letter from Henri A., Fals-Borda’s student then doing a PhD at Universidad Autónoma de México, on 3 October 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones Internacional, sub-folder Bolivia,Cuba,Ecuador,Mexico,Argentina_Mexico_28.

³¹ ‘The researcher ought to be a “neutral” observer, who abandoned his own subjective point of view and who would analyse social reality from the outside. In order to do this, a whole set of “scientific” technical instruments had to be incorporated that would secure the researcher’s objectivity and detachment when studying social phenomena.’ Falabella, ‘Highlights of the Development,’ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Inglaterra_65 Also letters from Falabella to Fals-Borda. Sub-folder Europa_II_Inglaterra_59-62.

³² Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 1.

from concerned social scientists. The aim of these centres was not to undermine theoretical and methodological scientific criteria but to counter-balance value-free science's claims to objectivity with its lack of social commitment. As Fals-Borda argued in his discussion of Rockefeller's report, 1969: 'Such claims to neutrality were not objective — they served to support the status quo.'³³

2.1. Towards committed sociology: The Congress of Mexico, 1969

At the end of the so-called first decade of developmental policy in Latin America, 1960–1970, the initial vigour of positivism had lessened, even in U.S. academic centres. Lee Taylor's report on 'Internationalizing Rural Sociology' concluded that 'we are not now training international rural sociologists and we do not have an international rural sociology'.³⁴ In a letter from Fals-Borda to Lee Taylor, the former remarked that this situation reflected a void between teaching prospects in the United States and social needs in developing countries, which was, basically, a problem of scientific orientation.³⁵

This concern had been already conveyed by Calvin Blair at the conference of Latin Americanists held in March 1968 at the State University of New York. As Blair put it: 'One of the signs of our time of transition is to be found in hasty efforts to calm an

³³ Fals-Borda, 'El Reto de Rockefeller,' in *Ciencia propia y colonialismo intelectual* (México: Nuestro Tiempo, 1970), 11-21. Originally presented in the Colloquium-debate on Rockefeller's report 'Quality of Life in the Americas,' *AID Washington*, 1969.

³⁴ Fals-Borda's letter to Lee Taylor, New Orleans, on 28 July 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_12.

³⁵ In his answer, Fals-Borda explained to Taylor that although methods and basic concepts may be the same for the U.S. and underdeveloped countries, the general approach should be different to allow for different sets of dominant value orientations: 'If rural sociology taught in the United States persists in the formalistic system approach, following an equilibrium model, it will be increasingly incongruous and useless for students coming from diverse social conditions who need to understand society in a quite different context.' Letter to Lee Taylor, on 28 July 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_12.

identity crisis in the social sciences professions.’³⁶ In this conference, Fals-Borda contested Kalman Silvert’s perception that Latin American social sciences were in an ‘uninspiring’ state of disarray, and Silvert’s prediction of the danger of a ‘continuing second-rate social science south of the Rio Grande’ if ‘North Americans romantically surrender to Latin American decisions in selecting research subjects’.³⁷

For Fals-Borda, any ‘second-rate social science’ south of the U.S. border was likely to be the result of naive imitation of some ‘second-rate theorizing and sterile concept-making devised in, and diffused from, the advanced countries’; it was unlikely to be due to the creativity of some of the best contemporary Latin American scholars, who had ‘got their hands dirty with local realities’.³⁸

Indeed, this crisis of identity was even more conspicuous in the 9th Latin American Congress of Sociology in Mexico, 1969, where the debate about ‘objectivity and commitment’ was at the core of the congress. Defending value-free sociology was the sociologist Aldo Solari, who did not lack examples to argue that on the day when sociologists occupied the role that Plato dreamed of for philosophers in society (something most unlikely to be desirable for any society), they would do so not as

³⁶ Calvin Blair, ‘Research in Latin America: Problems for the Policy Sciences,’ in *Latin America in Transition: Problems in Training and Research*, ed., Stanley R. Ross (Albany, University of the State of New York, 1970), 49.

³⁷ K. Silvert’s ‘An Essay on Interdisciplinary and International Collaboration in Social Science Research in Latin America,’ in *Latin America in Transition*, 107.

³⁸ For example, in sociology and social psychology ‘the transplant of the equilibrium model to explain local transformation, or of the anomie hypothesis as an automatic dependant variable of urbanization, or of “n-Ach” measure of attitudes have been, on the whole, unsuccessful; in anthropology, the effort to apply “social indecision” concepts to peasant groups in transition, as well as some bipolar typologies, has proved somewhat barren; in human geography, the Koppen climate classification and the search for “optimal loci” have led nowhere; in economics, the theory of the take-off stage of development does not appear to take real hold. Fals-Borda, ‘The role of the social scientist,’ 125. Some of these Latin American scholars Fals-Borda talked about were Luiz Costa Pinto, Jorge Graciarena, Eliseo Varón, Octavio Ianni, the pedagogist Paulo Freire, the political scientist Francisco Delich and the anthropologist Rodolfo Stavenhagen. The latter presented his technique of ‘militant observer’ in 1972, which Fals-Borda regarded as one of the links between social research and political participation. Fals-Borda, ‘Problemas y alcances actuales,’ 194.

sociologists, but as politicians.³⁹ On the other side was Fals-Borda, whose leading role as both member of the executive committee of the Latin American Social Science Council and chair of the session on 'The Latin American Crisis', was key to setting the tone for the Congress's final declaration.⁴⁰

The aim of Fals-Borda's paper for the Congress, 'La sociología de la crisis: Problemas de orientación y método' rather than undermine the need for scientific criteria in social research was to underline the thesis that all macro-social study, especially during period of acute conflict, ends up being political: 'In times of crisis,' Fals-Borda wrote to the sociologist Juan Marsal, 'I do not see how to avoid the political character of sociology and, therefore, avoid producing effects in this field.'⁴¹ The significance of the Mexico Congress was to define the two main currents of social research in Latin America: the 'neutral' and the 'committed'. The majority of the participants sided with the latter, so the congress was an opportunity to launch a new sociology, a 'committed sociology'.

Fals-Borda's paper, revised after the contributions of the participants in the session 'Sociology of Crisis', and re-written with the collaboration of the sociologist Pablo Gonzalez Casanova, provided the key lines adopted by the conference.⁴² About his role

³⁹ In a direct reference to Fals-Borda's *Subversion and Social Change in Colombia* (1967), Solari wrote: 'Hasta ahora, nadie ha podido demostrar científicamente ideas políticas, por lo que no es lícito tratar de imponer las propias bajo el manto y el prestigio de la ciencia'. Aldo Solari, 'Algunas reflexiones sobre el problema de los valores, la objetividad y el compromiso en las ciencias sociales,' 1969. *Revista Colombiana de Sociología*, vol. 34, no. 2 (2011): 199.

⁴⁰ Before the Conference, the germinal stage of Fals-Borda's paper was noted by Henri A: 'Tu contribución al congreso me parece que va a resultar polémica ya que el tema de por sí lo es. Pero pienso que lo será sobre todo debido a la etapa puramente formativa en que se haya el estudio de este problema, cosa que se transluce muy bien en tu trabajo. Desde luego sabes que comparto totalmente tus ideas al respecto, pero no puedo dejar de advertir este carácter de la cuestión.' Letter on 3 October 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacional, sub-folder Bolivia,Cuba,Ecuador,Mexico,Argentina_Mexico_28.

⁴¹ Fals-Borda's letter to Juan F. Marsal, 3 November 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_36.

⁴² They were: Florestan Fernandes, Luiz Pereira, Gerrit Huizer, Rodrigo Parra, Álvaro Camacho Guizado, Andrew Pearse, Hiber Conteris, Andrés Pascal, Armand Matterlart, Luis Soberón, Oscar Delgado and Ramón Pugh. Fals-Borda, letters with panelists list to Pablo González Casanova, Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, México, on 3 September and 6 October; and to Andrew Pearse on 5 May 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_01; 17; 26.

in writing the final declaration, Fals-Borda wrote to Rojas Guerra: ‘Toda esa corriente intelectual quedó expresada en los documentos oficiales del Congreso Latinoamericano de Sociología en México. Fui designado por los congresistas para formar parte de la comisión redactora de la declaración final ... Mis conclusiones fueron acogidas totalmente por la plenaria del Congreso. En fin, como ven, es este campo no queda sino seguir adelante, combinando el pensamiento con la acción.’⁴³

Indeed, the sense of having achieved something significant was openly expressed in Fals-Borda’s correspondence. To his friend Víctor Bonilla, and future co-founders of the Rosca Foundation, Fals-Borda wrote: ‘Fue un gran éxito, así desde el punto de vista científico como del político y de su orientación: es la consagración de la “sociología comprometida” ... es un paso adelante que marca pautas claras y nuevas para el desarrollo de la sociología en nuestro continente.’⁴⁴ Fals-Borda also sent a copy of the declaration to Bonilla, explaining that: ‘Es una declaración inusitada en un congreso científico, ¿no es cierto? Pero refleja los problemas que nos plantea la realidad en que vivimos. Así nos reconciamos con la sociología.’⁴⁵ The Solari–Fals-Borda debate not only enlivened the Congress but also served to promote Fals-Borda’s *Ciencia propia y colonialismo intelectual* (1969), which was published almost simultaneously by both Editorial Nuestro Tiempo and Siglo XXI Editores.⁴⁶

⁴³ Letter to J. M. Rojas Guerra and Hernando Ochoa, on 4 February 1970, ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_210-211.

⁴⁴ Letter to Víctor Bonilla, Geneva on 5 December 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_01. To his friends Carlos and Cecilia Castillo, Fals-Borda wrote: ‘Sobre este esfuerzo me han servido mucho las observaciones sobre la “sociología comprometida” que ha hecho Aldo Solari en el último número (No. 13) de la revista Aportes, de París. Vale la pena el artículo, por lo menos para ver cómo la lógica de la ciencia puede utilizarse, en parte, para defender proposiciones espúreas.’ Letter from Geneva on 18 July 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa II, Ginebra. Suiza_17.

⁴⁵ Letter to Víctor Bonilla, Geneva on 5 December 1969. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_01

⁴⁶ Letters to Fals-Borda from both publishers, 25 May and 3 June 1970. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Bolivia,Cuba,Ecuador,Mexico, Correspondencia a Mexico_23-26.

2.2. Towards Action Research: The Toronto Conference, 1974

The crisis Fals-Borda talked about at the Congress in Mexico 1969 was both political and epistemological. He described how the shortcomings of the Alliance for Progress's reformist policy in counteracting outbreaks of socio-political unrest in Latin America, during the first decade of developmental policy, gave way to a wave of protest and non-conformism which was met with military coups at the beginning of the 1970s.⁴⁷

Exiled in Chile after the military coup in Brazil, Paulo Freire and his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) became a reference point for the process of conscientisation and the ideological framework for agrarian reform in Chile under President Eduardo Frei, 1964–1970, and then with Salvador Allende.⁴⁸ The coup in Chile that toppled Allende on 11 September 1973 represented a real crisis for socialist parties aiming at political representation via democratic participation. Measures against Salvador Allende's supporters were taken beyond Chile's borders.⁴⁹

The repression did not stop committed and activist sociologists from enlarging their network. On the contrary, it stimulated them to engage actively with the academic world

⁴⁷ For significant periods from 1964 to 1990, eleven Latin American nations were controlled by long-term military governments, with changing leadership in most cases: Ecuador, 1963–1966 and 1972–1978; Guatemala, 1963–1985 (with an interlude from 1966–1969); Brazil, 1964–1985; Bolivia, 1964–1970 and 1971–1982; Argentina, 1966–1973 and 1976–1983; Peru, 1968–1980; Panama, 1968–1989; Honduras, 1963–1966 and 1972–1982; Chile, 1973–1990; and Uruguay, 1973–1984. In El Salvador the military dominated government from 1948 until 1984, but the last “episode” was from 1979 to 1984. Brian E. Loveman, *Military Government in Latin America, 1959–1990*, in Oxford Bibliographies. Accessed 12 April 2016. <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766581/obo-9780199766581-0015.xml>.

⁴⁸ Freire's pedagogy's standing principle was that ‘every individual being, no matter how “ignorant” or submerged in the “culture of silence” he may be, is capable of looking critically at his world in a dialogical encounter with others’. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1996), 12–15.

⁴⁹ In Peru, the country after Brazil where class struggle was most intense, the offices of the magazine *Sociedad y Política* were raided and the director and one of the editors exiled to Argentina on 6 October 1973. Edition no. 4 of the magazine discussed the ‘military-fascist coup’ on 11 September in Chile. The magazine was confiscated and copies were seized from the bookshops. After one year of intense protest, the magazine director, the well-known sociologist Aníbal Quijano, was allowed to return to Peru and re-open his magazine. The campaign of pressure had been coordinated from CLACSO in Mexico where Quijano had sought political asylum. Letters to and from Fals-Borda and Aníbal Quijano and Carmen de Quijano, Aníbal's wife between 23 September and 15 October 1973. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Bolivia,Cuba,Ecuador,Mexico, Correspondencia a Peru_19-34.

in the U.S. and Europe as well as with NGOs. In the Conference on Latin America in Transition: Problems in Training and Research, 1968, Fals-Borda remarked that ‘more than unilateral technical assistance, what is needed is honest partnership’.⁵⁰ A major step forward was the creation in the International Sociological Association (ISA), through the agency of Fals-Borda and Elen B. Hill, of the Research Committee on Innovative Processes in Social Change in 1972.⁵¹ Indeed, Latin American intellectual and cultural circles represented more than a mere exchange of ideas and trends. A well-organised network of effective solidarity evolved (of which the Fals-Bordas would benefit when they were imprisoned in 1979; see section 4).

In mid-1973, as chairman of the newly created Research Committee of ISA, Fals-Borda took part in the planning and prior coordination of the 8th World Congress of Sociology: Social Science and Revolution in Contemporary Societies to be held in Toronto, Canada, in 1974. Two months before the Toronto Conference, Fals-Borda attended the 11th Congress of the Asociación Latinoamericana de Sociología (ALAS), held in San José, Costa Rica, in June 1974, where ‘Committed Sociology’ was questioned. Francisco Delich warned against the dangerous tendency to assume that the problems posed by the relationship between social understanding and social transformation can be solved by stressing the need of commitment. In Delich’s words: ‘La mayor parte de los científicos sociales de orientación crítica y/o marxista, no realizan un esfuerzo suficientemente crítico de la relación entre la acción investigativa y la acción política; no advierten una diferencia sustancial: los prerequisites de una y otra acción son

⁵⁰ Fals-Borda, ‘The role of the social scientist,’ in *Latin America in Transition: Problems in Training and Research*, ed., Stanley R. Ross (Albany, University of the State of New York, 1970), 124.

⁵¹ By 1978, the committee had 113 members in 33 countries. Circular No. 18 on 15 September 1978. Fals-Borda re-elected as chairman of the committee. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Congresos_Asociaciones, sub-folder ISA_Research_Committee_093-094.

radicalmente distintos.’⁵² The main debate took place between two distinct approaches to Latin America: a debate between those authors who advocate an approach that focuses on the concept of imperialism and those who choose to make use of the category of dependence.⁵³

In the Toronto Conference, Ulf Himmelstrand introduced ‘Action Research’ — an approach that, as Fals-Borda observed, ‘may convert itself into “militant research”’.⁵⁴ Fals-Borda found other convergences in Toronto too. The questions Fals-Borda’s committee brought up were the same as he, as member of the Rosca Foundation, was facing in his praxis with peasant and indigenous communities in Colombia.⁵⁵ In a Circular (No. 6) to all members of the Committee on Innovative Processes in Social Change, Fals-Borda wrote:

It is our belief that if we focus our research toward these themes there will be a great boost not only for the level, content, and interest of our meeting, but also for the theoretical and methodological input of our discipline. Besides, we will be attuned to many urgencies of our time ... From your previous responses we could judge that a number of you are considerably advanced in the study of some of these proposed themes.⁵⁶

In his statement read at the main plenary of the Congress of Toronto, Fals-Borda qualified his claims in defence of commitment: ‘The effect of their work depends on the

⁵² Fals-Borda, ‘Problemas y alcances actuales de la Investigación Activa,’ with typed notes and Fals-Borda’s handwritten comments, October 1975. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_Orígenes_184.

⁵³ José Vicente Tavares-dos-Santos and Maíra Baumgarten, La Asociación Latinoamericana de Sociología, una historia de sus primeros congresos,’ *Sociologías, Porto Alegre*, n.14 (2005): 208.

⁵⁴ Ulf Himmelstrand, Professor at University of Uppsala, and ISA President between 1978 and 1982. See, Fals-Borda, ‘Sociologists Today,’ 2.

⁵⁵ ‘What are the connections between ideology and method? Between theory and praxis? How can committed social science contribute to concept-making? What is the technical and conceptual core of militant research? How can social sciences be decolonized? How can modernization studies be revalued away from ethnocentric notions of advanced countries?’ To address these questions four standpoints were considered: mechanisms of innovation from below; change and social problems; counterpoints in social change; and methods and concepts in social change. Fals-Borda, Circular N. 6 on 9 July 1973, Research Committee on Innovative Processes in Social Change, ISA, Circulars No. 6 and 9 July 1973. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Congresos_Asociaciones, sub-folder ISA_Research_Committee_008-010.

⁵⁶ Research Committee on Innovative Processes in Social Change, ISA, Circular No. 6, 9 July 1973. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Congresos_Asociaciones, sub-folder ISA_Research_Committee_009.

type of commitment that the social scientists have, whether they are for maintaining or transforming the status quo.’⁵⁷ What is worthy of attention is the underlying rationale for Fals-Borda’s statement. The point was raised by the sociologist Jorge Graciarena. Despite the tradition of intellectuals who consider knowledge as inseparable from social consciousness and moral responsibility, the trend into academia of technocrats has permitted the appearance of the so-called experts. ‘Experts,’ remarked Fals-Borda, ‘are pieces of the dominant machinery; they thrive on palliatives and, in essence, they are a conservative by-product of the system itself.’⁵⁸

The aforementioned debate between Solari and Fals-Borda revolved around criticism of ‘aseptic science’, namely, social scientists’ avoidance of socio-political subjects of research.⁵⁹ By 1974, it was the relationship between theory and action that needed clarification — for social scientists cannot validate their militancy only on the basis of the privilege of their profession, and vice versa. As L. Zamosc noted, a rather loose use of the notion of ‘praxis’ had underplayed the difference between scientific practice and political/ideological action in the 1960s.⁶⁰ Therefore, the most important contribution of the Latin American sociologists who attended the Toronto conference was, as Jean Labbens put it, the re-definition of the role played by sociologists in the socio-economic development of their societies.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Fals-Borda ‘Sociologists Today,’ 1.

⁵⁸ Fals-Borda, ‘Sociologists Today,’ 3.

⁵⁹ Fals-Borda, ‘The role of the social scientist’, 120.

⁶⁰ Zamosc, ‘Campesinos y sociólogos,’ 110.

⁶¹ ‘Cualquiera sea el futuro, el logro más importante de América Latina ha sido, de lejos, el desarrollo de una concepción del role del sociólogo.’ Fals-Borda, ‘Problemas y alcances actuales,’ 182.

3. Action Research: the epistemological issue

This dissertation has proceeded in a cautious way with the concept of ‘epistemological rupture’ to describe Fals-Borda’s intellectual journey. It was introduced in Chapter 1, to define the line of demarcation between scientific and speculative social studies in Colombia, established by Fals-Borda with his *Peasant Society* (1955), a landmark publication.

The notion of ‘rupture,’ meaning a significant change of scientific paradigms, has become a commonplace to describe Fals-Borda’s shift from positive-functionalism after his *Subversion* (1967).⁶² Even some of Fals-Borda’s authoritative critics have argued that 1967–1977 was a decade during which Fals-Borda consolidated a new epistemological model.⁶³ It is beyond doubt that *Subversion* represented a significant step towards dialectical thinking. However, whether or not Fals-Borda’s abandonment of positivism in the late 1960s was an epistemological rupture, and in which sense, requires further consideration.

Fals-Borda himself seemed to be much more sceptical than his critics about having achieved a substantial epistemological breakthrough in social sciences during this period. In a letter to his friend, the Mexican sociologist Sergio Bagú, on 12 September 1975, Fals-Borda thanked Bagú for his thoughtful consideration of his paper ‘Problemas y alcances de la investigación activa’ (1975); an analysis of the Rosca Foundation,

⁶² According to Herrera Farfán: ‘En el desarrollo del pensamiento-acción de Orlando Fals-Borda se va generando un proceso progresivo, consciente y decidido de ruptura epistemológica con los modelos europeos y norteamericanos de ciencia social, importados acríticamente e implantados irreflexivamente en las academias latinoamericanas.’ In ‘Orlando Fals-Borda, Pedagogo de la Praxis,’ *ANALES de la Universidad Central de Ecuador*, no. 372 (2014): 223; Jaime Jaramillo, introduction to Fals-Borda’s *Antología* (2010), 13; 24; Alexander Pereira, ‘Fals Borda: La Formación de un intelectual disórgano,’ *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura* 35 (2008): 376.

⁶³ ‘Consideramos que este modelo de producir conocimiento científico fue construido por Orlando Fals-Borda en el transcurso de una década: entre 1967, con la publicación del libro *La subversión en Colombia*, y 1977, con la realización del Simposio Mundial sobre Investigación Activa y Análisis Científico, en Cartagena.’ Rojas Guerra, prologue, xxxii. Also Castillo-Cárdenas, introduction to *La influencia religiosa en la conciencia social de Orlando Fals-Borda*, 19.

1970–1975. Some aspects of this paper in relation to practical issue of Action Research in Colombia had already been published in 1973.⁶⁴

According to Bagú, Fals-Borda's search for a way of bringing together research and action was critical, innovative and committed to the people; however, it fell short of clarifying the theoretical basis of Action Research and of considering some substantial methodological problems. In Bagú's opinion, two factors explained why initiatives of renewal among the new generation of social scientists in Latin America seemed to have reached an exhaustion point. First the failure in planning the stages that should follow social protest and second, the tendency to consider only superficially the relationship between theory and method in social sciences. In his own words: 'Hay que explorar todos los caminos imaginables — en metodología y en teoría — para que finalmente se vaya viendo que la ampliación del horizonte cognoscitivo se traduce en una mayor capacidad de organización y de acción ... Un nuevo análisis, auténticamente diferente, se justifica en la medida en que nos conduzca a un modo de actuar más inteligente.'⁶⁵

Fals-Borda's response to Bagú illustrates the process of intense and ceaseless search he had been through between 1970 and 1975. It also set out the priorities for his immediate intellectual and political agenda:

Como tú lo señalas [los aspectos teóricos de la investigación activa] son el talón de Aquiles del 'esfuerzo comprometido' en las ciencias sociales. Francamente, hasta ahora en mi propio trabajo no he visto ni sentido grandes avances teóricos. En mi caso esto ha representado más que todo una transición del funcionalismo al marxismo, pero al fin al cabo dentro de los marcos teóricos de cada escuela. Y tú sabes que innovar teóricamente dentro del marxismo es cosa de alta escuela. No obstante, me estoy convenciendo de que el meollo del asunto va a estar en el análisis de los mecanismos de los procesos sociales (en lo cual encajaría tu preocupación sobre la naturaleza de la acción política). Como este análisis debe llevar a un

⁶⁴ Fals-Borda, 'Reflexiones sobre la aplicación del método de Estudio-Acción en Colombia,' *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, vol. 35, no. 1 (1973): 49-62.

⁶⁵ Letter from Sergio Bagú to Fals-Borda on 7 September 1975. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_Orígenes_382-383.

aumento en la eficacia de los grupos que buscan el cambio social (los radicales, los revolucionarios, etc.) se cumpliría así el requisito de la investigación activa de que se haga ciencia y práctica útil para los fines populares estipulados. ... Te quedo muy agradecido por el empujón que me das de hacerle frente a este problema teórico que había dejado de lado por el interés inicial en lo práctico.⁶⁶

Fals-Borda's re-writing of 'Problemas y alcances actuales de la investigación activa,' after the conferences in Costa Rica and Toronto in 1974, and Sergio Bagú's comments on the theoretical issues of Action Research in 1975, was in many ways an attempt to re-assess his praxis with the Rosca Foundation. The amended draft concluded that the Rosca Foundation's first approach to action-orientated research described in the collective book *Causa popular ciencia popular* (1972) was already outdated.⁶⁷ First, because the theoretical and methodological problems which sprang from linking theory and action provided evidence that the concept of 'commitment' suffered from serious epistemological limitations. Second, because Fals-Borda's Marxist analysis of concrete local realities such as modes of production and social formations showed him that the main challenges for action-orientated research were not methodological. In terms of method, the Rosca Foundation had made significant contributions: 1) a new scientific language to communicate effectively with intellectuals, activists and the masses, although, as Fals-Borda acknowledged, 'it somewhat slows the pace of the feedback necessary to accelerate change process'; 2) the simplification of research techniques; 3) the development of 'people's researchers', about which Fals-Borda observed: 'The discovery of local researchers has been one of the most exhilarating experiences of action researchers in Colombia — a new type of research experience: the communal self-investigation'; 4) for political and ethical reasons, the data and information

⁶⁶ Letter from Fals-Borda to Sergio Bagú, on 12 September 1975. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder FR/RIAS_Orígenes_381.

⁶⁷ 'Hoy superado por el desarrollo de las actividades emprendidas y la necesidad de especificar y clarificar aún más los marcos teóricos y políticos en los que se ha movido la fundación.' Fals-Borda, 'Problemas y alcances actuales,' 187. This essay constituted the basis for Fals-Borda's much more elaborate paper 'Por la Praxis', presented at the Symposium of Cartagena, 1977.

produced by the research must return in the first place to the community. In contrast to the traditional criteria used by academic circles to validate the production of social knowledge, 'validation is found in praxis, and in its critical examination of the results of action; 5) critical recovery of culture and history.'⁶⁸ However, for this type of research the creation of alternative modes of power was critical. In the context of social imperatives of a peripheral capitalism, the connection between theory and action was ideological and political rather than operational, as will be discussed in the next section.

This new development resonated with a group of scholars from Puerto Rico and the U.S. They were organising a counter-conference to oppose the already established Caribbean Studies Association which was, according to the dissidents, 'a bastion of the U.S. academic imperialism.'⁶⁹ Using Fals-Borda's *Ciencia propia y colonialismo intelectual* (1970), the group issued an open letter which called for de-colonisation of academic practices and commitment in the liberation of Caribbean countries. The leader of the initiative and director of the Third World Association of Anthropologists, Manuel Maldonado-Denis, wrote to Fals-Borda:

Seguramente ya habrás recibido una petición del Programa de Estudios Latinoamericanos de la Universidad de Illinois en Chicago para que formes parte de una Junta Internacional de Asesores de dicho programa. Quisiera pedirte encarecidamente que aceptes formar parte de la Junta por considerar que esta será una trinchera del pensamiento crítico dentro de los Estados Unidos mismos y una excelente forma de comunicación permanente entre nosotros.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Fals-Borda, 'Sociologists Today,' 4-6. See also Ulrich Oslender, 'Leaving the field: how to write about disappointment and frustration in collaborative research,' in *Bridging Scholarship and Activism: Reflections from the Frontlines of Collaborative Research*, ed., Bernd Reiter and Ulrich Oslender (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2015), 63-74; Zamosc, 'Campesinos y sociólogos,' 115-118.

⁶⁹ ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_Norteamérica, Estados Unidos y Puerto Rico_108-112.

⁷⁰ Letter on 23 September 1975. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_Norteamérica, Estados Unidos y Puerto Rico_123-124.

This section would include a long list of events or international commitments in which Fals-Borda was involved during 1970–1975 were it to cover them all.⁷¹ Instead, it emphasizes that, along with Fals-Borda's participation in the occupation of land and his participation in the peasant movement in the Colombian Atlantic Coast, the validation of Action Research as 'a new type of research experience' implied a confrontation with well-established theories and frames of reference. This was only possible in the intellectual discussion held at international and interdisciplinary levels and was as essential as his joining the peasant movement for the consolidation of what was later known as PAR.

4. Towards PAR: the agrarian question and the definition of 'participation'

'The fight is also theoretical and ideological,' Fals-Borda wrote to Jose Maria Rojas Guerra and Hernando Ochoa, who at the time were researchers in Colombia working on the study of cooperatives directed by Fals-Borda at UNRISD.⁷² As his letter carries on: 'I have intellectually and politically stood out against the regime of the National Front, and I will maintain this position.'⁷³

⁷¹ In 1972, member of the committee of the Third World Congress of Rural Sociology, Dijón, France. As member of the Board of CLACSO, Fals-Borda was invited in early 1973 by the Bariloche Foundation, Argentina, to form part of a group of intellectuals such as Hugo Scolnik, Marcos Kaplan, Jose Silva Michelena, Osvaldo Sunkel, Helio Jaguaribe, Jorge Sabato able to work in a world-wide alternative model of development from and for the Third World. This project was meant to be an answer to the model of development proposed by Meadows group from MIT. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacional, sub-folder Bolivia,Cuba,Ecuador,Mexico,Argentina_Argentina_09. In June 1973, Fals-Borda was invited to be a member of the Editorial Board of the International Journal of Critical Sociology, University of Rajasthan, India. Letter from and to T.K. Unnithan, Director of the International Journal of Critical Sociology, University of Rajasthan, and Fals-Borda, on 26 June, 16 July and 27 September 1973. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Correspondencia_Internacional, sub-folder India, Correspondencia_1973_001-010.

⁷² Letter on 4 February 1970. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_209-210.

⁷³ Letter to J. M. Rojas Guerra and Hernando Ochoa, on 4 February 1970. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Suiza_211.

Fals-Borda's theoretical and ideological fight from 1968 to 1975 was not a fight over theories or meanings of concepts such as commitment and militancy, but above all a struggle to prevent sociology from being turned into an apology or justification for (supra)national policies. Consequently, Fals-Borda's dispute over the definitions of 'participation' was not semantic but ideological and political. In 1960s, as Fals-Borda recalled it, the idea of 'participation' was assimilated to replace that of 'development', which had been failing into disrepute.⁷⁴ This section, after introducing briefly the historical context of the government official participation policy in the late 1960s, and its failure in the early 1970s, will examine the preliminary developments of the concept of participation in Fals-Borda's praxis between 1970 and 1975; an aspect which will be discussed further in the closing chapter.

4.1. The agrarian question and the failure of participation policy, 1966–1974

As Vice-Minister of Agriculture in 1960, Fals-Borda's main duty was the preparation of the Bill of Agrarian Reform. In November 1960, just before it was presented to Congress for debate, Fals-Borda — with a great sense of optimism — wrote to Lynn Smith: 'This is the closest Colombia has come to a real reform in her history.'⁷⁵ Based on the prospects and first developments of these reforms, Lynn Smith then prepared a study on agrarian reform in Colombia.⁷⁶ As it transpired, very little of Fals-Borda's emphasis on the involvement of rural communities was inserted into the Law of Agrarian Reform enacted in 1961.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Fals-Borda, 'Action Research in the Convergence,' 158.

⁷⁵ Letter from Fals-Borda to Lynn Smith, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Florida, on 23 November 1960. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1440, Folder 12_25.

⁷⁶ Lynn Smith, *Colombia: Social Structure and the Process of Development* (1967).

⁷⁷ At the 2nd Latin American Conference on Agrarian Problems in Montevideo, Uruguay, organised by Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, Fals-Borda presented a paper based on the ideological framework he has set for the Bill of Agrarian Reform, 1959. His paper, 'The Social Function of Property,' gave rise to an intense debate after which the Conference adopted it as the ideological

Four years later, commenting on the INCORA's disappointing report of 1963, Fals-Borda wrote to Smith: 'During the last year INCORA has had an important change of policy that contradicts its previous orientation — the same one presented by you in your study.'⁷⁸ And discussing INCORA's latest shortcomings, Fals-Borda said: 'I think that as a whole such criticism is justified, but it is my feeling that Peñalosa is making a tactical move to bid for time until the Liberal administration is back in power. With President Valencia it is hard to organise real reform. Probably if Peñalosa can succeed in keeping his Institute together and active for the next two years, something more definitive might be done after 1966.'⁷⁹

Fals-Borda's prediction came true. Carlos Lleras Restrepo, Vice-President and Director of the Agrarian Reform Committee during Alberto Lleras's administration, 1958–1962, was elected president in 1966. As Fals-Borda wrote to Smith in 1964, the agrarian question was going to be the key issue for the next presidential elections. As it happened, it was even more crucial for the elections of 1970 when General Rojas Pinilla's Popular National Alliance (ANAPO), posed a threat to the continuity of the National Front. In the 1960s there emerged what Jonathan Hartlyn called a *floating electorate*, that is, an urban electorate de-linked from the traditional parties in opposition to the traditional *captive electorate*.⁸⁰

Capitalising on the growing discontent and unrest in the cities, ANAPO had grown from a faction of the Conservative Party to a significant force that also included opposition sectors of the Liberal Party. In the 1966 elections, ANAPO gained a significant

platform for an authentic agrarian reform for Latin American countries. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1440, Folder 12_45-47.

⁷⁸ Letter from Fals-Borda to Lynn Smith, on 30 October 1964. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1440, Folder 12_5.

⁷⁹ Peñalosa, General Director of INCORA. See letter from Fals-Borda to Lynn Smith, on 30 October 1964. ACH-UN, FAFS, Box 1440, Folder 12_5.

⁸⁰ Jonathan Hartlyn, *The Politics of Coalition Rule in Colombia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 165.

28.1 percent of the votes.⁸¹ To neutralise the rise of Rojas Pinilla's populism, Carlos Lleras had an even more aggressive plan to curb ANAPO and also to secure the continuity of the National Front beyond 1974.⁸² He sought to create a coalition of industrialists, workers and peasant beneficiaries against traditional landowners whilst establishing the basis for a strong policy of state intervention. With this aim, the government prepared an ambitious agrarian reform to introduce compulsory redistribution of land and it created the National Association of Peasants (ANUC) organised and led by the National government.

The political influence of landowners, as in the reforms of 1936 and 1961, was powerful in the Congress hence Lleras Restrepo's bold strategy was to organise and mobilise the peasants on a national scale in order to force the landowners to compromise on land distribution. As Zamosc pointed out 'Lleras Restrepo squared the circle' by establishing a national peasant movement (politically neutral) to spearhead an agrarian project of bourgeois reformism.⁸³ By reinforcing the National Front's control over the mobilised peasantry, the government aimed to block any upsurge of Rojas Pinilla's populism and revolutionary guerrilla groups such as National Liberation Army (ELN), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) or the new Popular Liberation Army (EPL).

By mid-1968, the Ministry of Agriculture, through INCORA, had instructed some 4,500 functionaries on the new participation policy, and ANUC membership surpassed 600,000 members. In 1971 it grew to 989,000.⁸⁴ One month before Lleras Restrepo finished his administration, with a declaration of principles during the First National

⁸¹ Leon Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement in Colombia: Struggles of the National Peasant Association, 1967–1981* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 47.

⁸² Zamosc observed that there were many indications that Lleras Restrepo was also interested in providing himself with a strong electoral base among the peasantry for a second presidential bid. *The Agrarian Question*, 49.

⁸³ Silvia Rivera Casicanqui, *Política e ideología en el movimiento campesino colombiano: el caso de la ANUC* (Bogotá: CINEP, 1982), 68-69; Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question*, 50-51.

⁸⁴ Hartlyn, *The Politics*, 168.

Congress in July 1970, a well-organised ANUC was set in motion. Its central point was a 'call for a swift, drastic and massive agrarian reform including land re-distribution and complementary programmes of credit, technical assistance and marketing'.⁸⁵

In a country where only 3.6 percent of landowners possessed 64.2 percent of the national cultivable land and where 56 percent of the peasantry owned only 4.2 percent of land suitable for agriculture in 1968, Lleras Restrepo's terms for agrarian reform were indeed revolutionary.⁸⁶ In fact, Lleras Restrepo himself spoke of a 'rapid change equivalent to a revolution'.⁸⁷

In spite of ANUC's support for the conservative Misael Pastrana, candidate of the National Front for the 1970 presidential elections, Pastrana defeated Rojas Pinilla by only a very slight margin of 1.6 percent.⁸⁸ ANAPO claimed the government had fraudulently manipulated the electoral results in marginal rural areas since Rojas Pinilla had obtained a round victory in eighteen out of the twenty-two main cities of the country.⁸⁹

Although Pastrana had during his campaign adhered to Lleras Restrepo's policies of agrarian reform, it became clear that Pastrana had no intention of challenging the close historical relationship of the Conservative Party with the powerful landowners. On the other hand, the narrow electoral triumph in the elections of 1970 cast serious doubt on the legality of Pastrana's government, which led the coalition of the National Front to an ambitious plan to gain the cities where the elected government had suffered an appalling defeat. Despite the new government's lack of support for the peasant movement, in the

⁸⁵ Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question*, 68.

⁸⁶ Nineteenth-five percent of the peasant households had neither water nor electricity service. Germán Guzmán, *La Violencia en Colombia, parte descriptiva* (Cali: Ediciones Progreso: 1968), 9.

⁸⁷ *El Espectador*, 10 February 1969.

⁸⁸ Pastrana obtained 1,625,025 votes against 1,561,468 for Rojas Pinilla. See Gabriel Silva Luján, 'Carlos Lleras y Misael Pastrana: reforma del estado y crisis del Frente Nacional,' in *Nueva historia de Colombia*, vol. II, (Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana Editorial, 1989), 254.

⁸⁹ Silva Luján, 'Carlos Lleras,' 255.

first wave of land invasion in February 1971 more than 15,000 families occupied some 350 estates. In a second wave between October and November, 300 states were occupied and the seizure of land was estimated at 150,000 hectares. The actions concentrated on the Atlantic Coast and the plains of Huila and Tolima.⁹⁰ In the wake of ANUC vitality, in spite of its internal division, the government, with members of the private sector and of the traditional land ownership, sealed a formal declaration of agrarian counter-reform in the town of Chicoral in January 1972.

The 'Pact of Chicoral' was endorsed by all factions of the Conservative and Liberal parties, including many who had supported the reformist leanings of the previous administration. The Pact's effects were immediate: the police, the army and even private gangs were used to oust the peasants from the land that had been invaded with the official support of INCORA. Such repression revived the mood of *la Violencia*:

Repression had already become a clear official policy: INCORA functionaries were instructed not to interfere, the police and the army were ordered to use harsher methods in the evictions, and military majors were put in charge of the more affected municipalities. After the Pact of Chicoral, the assaults on the land invaders increased, including the mobilisation of army battalions, the militarisation of entire regions, and the imprisonment of whole groups of families who were kept for long periods in jail and subjected to ill-treatment and abuse.⁹¹

As the historiographers of ANUC have pointed out, repression was not the only strategy deployed by the government; fostering an internal division of the peasant movement, already politicised and on its way to radical polarisation, proved as effective as the use of brute force to make the peasants withdraw from the battle for land. In fact, in the western savannahs of the Atlantic Coast, the region where Fals-Borda had joined the peasant movement, internal division of ANUC and the consequent dispute over legitimacy forced the groups to devote most of their efforts to activities such as

⁹⁰ Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question*, 71.

⁹¹ Zamosc, *The Agrarian Question*, 103.

assemblies and educational regional seminars in order to sustain their support.⁹²

Fals-Borda's refusal to establish his own political movement, or to side with either the official line or the radical left of peasant movement, forced Fals-Borda to abandon temporarily his activities in the region in 1975 and caused the disintegration of the Fundación del Caribe. A number of studies have already examined Fals-Borda's role as activist of the peasant movement.⁹³

The 'Pact of Chicoral' and its immediate effects upon the peasantry reignited the question at stake during the time of *la Violencia*: 'The antagonism between illegitimate use of institutionalised violence and justification of just rebellion or counter-violence.'⁹⁴ As indicated in Chapter 5, Fals-Borda's *Subversion* implied a long systematic strategy to counter a system of political exclusion and extreme social inequality maintained through repressive means. The praxis underlying the origins of PAR was driven by the search for such a strategy. Notwithstanding Fals-Borda's developments of Action Research, it was the redefinition of 'Participation' — the meaning of which has been taken for granted — that proved to be the ultimate subversive element of his method, as will be seen in the next section.

⁹² As Zamosc noted: 'Personnel were diverted to these activities at the cost of losing the momentum that had been gained with the land invasions. The government took advantage of this situation to reorganize repressive measures that had been previously dwarfed by the very magnitude of the peasant offensive.' *The Agrarian Question*, 104. For ANUC's phase of radicalisation and confrontation see also Rivera Casicanqui, *Política e ideología*, 115-135.

⁹³ Fals-Borda's self-evaluation presented in the First Symposium of Action-Research in Cartagena, 1977, and his four-volume research on the history of the Colombian Caribbean, *Historia Doble de la Costa* (1979, 1981, 1984, 1986). Ernesto Parra assessed Fals-Borda's praxis and research techniques in his *La Investigación-Acción en la Costa Atlántica: Evaluación de la Rosca 1972-1974* (1983). León Zamosc provided a comparative study between Fals-Borda's and his own work in Action Research with vegetal fibre growers. Zamosc concluded that Action-Research's targets, in terms of knowledge and communal organisation, are more likely to be attainable when researchers are less conditioned by the pressure of a radicalised context and also when they are less prompt to assume the political leadership. Leon Zamosc, 'Campesinos y sociólogos: reflexiones sobre dos experiencias de investigación activa,' 1987, in *La Investigación-Acción Participativa. Inicios y Desarrollos* ed., María Cristina Salazar (Caracas: Editorial Laboratorio Educativo, 2009), 77-119. Víctor Negrete Barrera, director of Fundación del Caribe, also analysed Fals-Borda's contributions to the development of PAR in the region in his *La Investigación Acción Participativa en Córdoba* (2013).

⁹⁴ Fals-Borda, *Subversion*, 177.

4.2. The epistemological validation of ‘participation’

The question that Fals-Borda dealt with during the years preceding the establishment of PAR can be posed as follows: How to differentiate an emancipating form of political participation from demagogic manipulation? In his *Subversion and Social Change in Colombia* (1969), Fals-Borda defined the task as that of breaking the cumbersome oligarchic apparatus of the National Front through the creation of a popular alternative for political participation inspired by the ideology of Father Camilo Torres.⁹⁵ However, in the 1970s the struggle for political participation was not only against the local bourgeoisie or the antagonistic factions of ANUC. If Camilo Torres’s pluralist utopia were to be validated methodologically, the concept of ‘participation’ had to be debated with other social researchers and international agencies which were using the term indiscriminately.

In 1968, in his response to K. Silvert, Fals-Borda stated that departing from sheer imitation — an ultimate proof of fruitful scholarship, industriousness and productive dedication — ‘would require hard work, harder than we in Latin America have been able to do until now.’⁹⁶ Six years later, participation in political militancy for revolutionary social change had proved to be that intellectual limit which stimulates the development of critical knowledge and utopian thought.⁹⁷ Whether or not, or — even better — to what extent, such political militancy had also been a serious scientific undertaking was at the core of Fals-Borda’s evaluation of the Rosca Foundation experience.

The evaluation of the Rosca Foundation’s praxis was a task for many individuals. Even SAREC took an active role in it. In 1976, SIDA commissioned the Brazilian

⁹⁵ Fals-Borda, *Subversion*, 176-179.

⁹⁶ Fals-Borda, ‘The Role of the Social Scientist,’ 126.

⁹⁷ Fals-Borda, ‘Sociologists Today,’ 2.

social scientist José Ferreira de Alencar to undertake an evaluation of the Rosca Foundation's programmes and publications funded by SAREC.⁹⁸ For Ferreira, the material he analysed constituted a 'heterogeneous collection under a desired theoretical and methodological unit which was not always achieved'.⁹⁹ His major concern was the recurring use of, and reference to, the concept of commitment: 'Consideramos,' wrote Ferreira, 'que la expresión "investigación comprometida" es insuficiente, ambigua y por tanto inadecuada para designar una práctica científica consecuente al servicio del progreso, del desarrollo y del bienestar social.'¹⁰⁰ In response to the report, Fals-Borda wrote to Claes Croner, SAREC Research Officer:

For Alencar's study, may I say that I am surprised at the general positive tone of his criticism, although it is true that now, somewhat above the atmosphere of polemics in which Rosca lived during its existence, many former critics are recognizing the merits of this foundation. In fact, such was one of the conclusions one can gather from the Cartagena Symposium on Action Research. As for Alencar's criticism of 'commitment' he is right, but *passé*, as Rosca's subsequent directives went beyond 'commitment' to define militant and active research more clearly. My own paper for Cartagena, I believe, clearly solves this problem.¹⁰¹

However, no even the International Symposium in Cartagena on Action Research, 1977, important as it was, was considered by Fals-Borda to consolidate a new methodological

⁹⁸ SIDA funded some of the Rosca's projects. See footnote 10.

⁹⁹ Material analysed: Causa Popular, Ciencia Popular (1972); La verdad es revolucionaria: manifiesto de la Fundación Rosca de Investigación y Acción Social (1974); Historias de Raca Mandaca (1975) by Sánchez Juliao; Esclavitud y Libertad en el Valle del Cauca (1975) by Mateo Mina; La Cuestión Indígena en Colombia (1975) by Ignacio Torres Giraldo; Historia de la Cuestión Agraria en Colombia (1975) by Fals Borda and other material for seminars and courses with the peasants. José Ferreira de Alencar, 'Informe sobre la Fundación Rosca de Investigación y Acción Social, Colombia.' ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Correspondencia_Internacional, sub-folder Suecia_SAREC_1976_02.

¹⁰⁰ Ferreira, 'Informe sobre la Fundación Rosca,' 33.

¹⁰¹ Letter on 28 May 1977. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Correspondencia_Internacional, sub-folder Suecia, SAREC Correspondencia_1977_16.

paradigm in social sciences.¹⁰² In 1987, Fals-Borda was still ‘fighting’ to differentiate the uniqueness of his method from other forms of action-orientated research.¹⁰³

The correspondence between Fals-Borda and the Chilean sociologist Gonzalo Falabella is interesting because it reveals those elements which Fals-Borda had clarified during the process of evaluation of the Rosca Foundation in the late 1970s. In his analysis of the work of the Rosca Foundation with the base cadres of the peasant movement and the indigenous communities of Cauca, Falabella wrote that this constituted ‘the most important experience of research-action carried out in the Colombian setting (and perhaps elsewhere) by Orlando Fals-Borda and a team of social researchers in eight regions of the country.’ However, for Falabella, as the Rosca Foundation had thrown in its lot with the peasant movement ANUC, ‘the experience as such failed in most of its aims, and is not therefore encouraging.’ However, he concluded: ‘The self-critique, which Fals-Borda has courageously undertaken, is most important in order to look for the alternative paths.’¹⁰⁴

Fals-Borda’s letters to Falabella showed in the first place, a re-definition of Action

Research in relation to Fals-Borda’s ideological stance and practical aims. As he put it:

No encuentro claras las definiciones que haces en la primera página, y menos lo de research-action y action-research.¹⁰⁵ Pero yo mismo considero que aquello que llamé action-research en 1972 era preparatorio de lo que hoy llamamos participatory research, como tú también lo dices en la página 2. Quizás la confusión radique en que el término action-research cubre toda la gama desde la derecha (Lewin) hasta el centro (Sol Tax) y la izquierda

¹⁰² First Symposium on Action Research and Scientific Analysis (18–23 April 1977) in Cartagena, Colombia. It was attended by more than a hundred representatives from twenty-six countries. Four key notes included Fals-Borda’s ‘For Praxis: The problem of how to investigate reality in order to transform it,’ and twenty-seven more papers were discussed in committees.

¹⁰³ Discussion with sociologist Joao Bosco Pinto. Letters on 9 December 1987: 10 April and 9 June 1988. ACH-UN, FOFB, Folder Brasil, sub-folder Correspondencia_Brasil_48-53.

¹⁰⁴ Falabella, ‘Highlights of the Development,’ 76.

¹⁰⁵ According to Falabella: ‘Research-Action, which supposes that the researcher starts from a theoretical or ideological conception of the group being studied and of strategies for its transformation leading to radical social change; or hopes to act as adviser to outside agencies such as the state or the church (action-research) or a party (militant-research).’ Falabella, ‘Highlights of the Development,’ 62-63.

(nosotros). La diferencia es teleológica, y esto es muy importante de enfatizar ... Por eso hoy, cuando empleo el término investigación-acción, siempre le adiciono los adjetivos ‘radical’ y ‘participativa’.¹⁰⁶

Second, in the early 1980s the ‘unsuccessful’ political achievements of the Rosca Foundation had been re-assessed by the Rosca members and supporting institutions. Although the Rosca Foundation was legally closed down in 1975, funding already granted by SAREC kept the foundation technically alive, until its projects were completely evaluated. To this end, SAREC commissioned an overall assessment in 1979. Thus, despite the modest achievements of ANUC after the ‘Pacto de Chicoral’ and its ideological division, which had a serious impact on the Rosca, Fals-Borda noted in his reply to Falabella, that the peasant movement was in the process of reorganization on the basis of the experience of the early 1970s. ‘Tu frase (p. 15) sobre los fracasos del trabajo realizado en Colombia en la década de los 70 es sólo parcialmente cierta,’ wrote Fals-Borda. ‘Ahora al cabo de una evaluación realizada por un equipo independiente, se ve que de aquella experiencia quedó mucho más de lo que habíamos esperado; y que ... hasta el movimiento campesino resurge ahora sobre las bases de los alcanzado en los baluartes de la época.’¹⁰⁷

It is important to note that the immediate origins of PAR comprised two aspects:

The Rosca Foundation’s social research and activism with the grassroots movements followed by the equally important and painstaking evaluation and systematisation, which demanded just as much forethought, innovation and methodological planning as did the original research. In 1975, Fals-Borda wrote to the Peruvian sociologist Darcy Ribeiro about his book *Historia de la Cuestión Agraria en Colombia*. It was written for the cadres of the peasant movement of the región of the Atlantic Coast. His letter

¹⁰⁶ Fals-Borda, letter on 8 January 1982 to Gonzalo Falabella. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Inglaterra_58.

¹⁰⁷ Fals-Borda’s letter on 8 January 1982 to Gonzalo Falabella. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_II_Inglaterra_59. ‘Baluartes’ see closing chapter, 2.2.

concludes: ‘Me estoy embarcando en el proyecto de articular formalmente la metodología de estudio-acción desarrollada por esta Fundación Rosca. Este último proyecto es bastante complejo, pero lo vemos como necesario desde todo punto de vista.’¹⁰⁸

To what extent this evaluation was a priority for Fals-Borda can be seen in a letter sent to Karl Eric in 1979 after Fals-Borda and his wife had been thrown into jail by the government of the Liberal Turbay, accused of being ideologues of the newly founded guerrilla groups M-19. ‘Military power increased shortly after Turbay came to office when his administration enacted a tough “statute on security” presidential fiat using state of siege powers.’¹⁰⁹ Fals-Borda was released soon after, but his wife was kept in jail for more than a year despite the fact that no charges were made against her. At that time, the support of the international solidarity was more crucial than it had been before. Despite the official protest of Turbay’s government, Fals-Borda was awarded by the Austrian Government the 1981 Bruno Kreisky Prize for his work on the defence of Human Rights in Colombia. In 1984, he was given the U.S. Paul G. Hoffman Award for his contribution to research and people’s development.

No sooner was Fals-Borda released than he wrote to Karl Eric, at SAREC, asking him to do ‘everything in his power’ to impede interruption of the evaluation study of the Rosca experience in Colombia: ‘In spite of recent difficulties, which you know, my colleagues and I have kept on working on this project, as we consider it highly important for us, for the rural people, politically and scientifically. And it will also give

¹⁰⁸ Letter on 26 June 1975. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Bolivia,Cuba,Ecuador,Mexico_Perú_41.

¹⁰⁹ Hartlyn, *The Politics*, 217.

you very useful insight on national and international dimensions of rural development work and research.’¹¹⁰

With the benefit of hindsight

Fals-Borda called this period, 1970–1974, the ‘iconoclastic’ and ‘anti-intellectual’ stage in his career. It was a period of active research, focused on fieldwork techniques such as social intervention and militant research and characterized by activism.¹¹¹ However, as this chapter has shown, it was also a period of crucial and fruitful intellectual exchange and collaborations. The Symposium of Cartagena, 1977, was a privileged occasion for Fals-Borda, allowing him to put his own experience to the test and to encourage scholars and activists to move one step forward in the epistemological elaboration of the relationship between critical practice and militant research.¹¹² The endeavour paid off. The collaborative works with Anisur Rahman, Joao Bosco Pinto and many others, and the debate with Majid Rahnema, significantly boosted the discussion of key elements for the consolidation of PAR¹¹³ — in particular the philosophical approach to participation, an aspect which defines the identity of PAR inasmuch as it deals with the question of power and popular power. In the 1997 World Conference on PAR in Cartagena, epistemologist Heinz Moser observed that: ‘We’re in the face of a new

¹¹⁰ Fals-Borda’s letter to Karl Eric Knutsson, SAREC, Stockholm, on 24 April 1979. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Correspondencia_Internacional, sub-folder Suecia_SAREC_1979_111.

¹¹¹ The other stages Fals-Borda considered in this paper are: First systematizations, 1977–1982; Advance to macro and political dimensions, 1982–1986; Dialogue with the Establishment, 1986 to the present. Fals-Borda, ‘Notes on the present status of PAR,’ (International Group for Grassroots Initiatives (IGGRI): Paper for internal discussion only. Meeting, New Delhi, 1 April 1988). ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder IAP, sub-folder IAP Otros_Países, Debate Majid Rahnema_001-004.

¹¹² On the aim of the Symposium Fals-Borda wrote to Nantel Brisset: ‘Determinar científicamente la naturaleza de las relaciones entre la teoría social y la práctica del desarrollo socio-económico y político que lleve a transformaciones verdaderamente significativas de la sociedad.’ Letter to Nantel Brisset, Centro internacional de Investigaciones para el Desarrollo, Bogotá, on 17 March 1976. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_Norteamérica/Canada_71.

¹¹³ See the Anisur Rahman’s, Joao Bosco Pinto’s and Majid Rahnema’s contribution to PAR in closing chapter, section 3.3.

paradigm in social science and we've got to work.'¹¹⁴ However, by the late-1970s, validation of the method was still incomplete.¹¹⁵

In summary it is worth spelling out the complexity of the task pursued by Fals-Borda. On the one hand, following the period of Action Research praxis between 1970–1975, Fals-Borda aimed at fulfilling all scholarly requirements of knowledge accumulation, concept making, methodological and theoretical systematization, 1975–1982. On the other hand, the practical purpose of his method of social research had political implications: to break, through political awareness and participation, the unjust order of exclusion to which the ruling oligarchy of the National Front had subjected the rural population by violent means. Therefore, innovation, decolonisation and participation were not merely academic concepts to be debated but were instead non-violent mechanisms of political participation to be theoretically and methodologically articulated. With the benefit of hindsight, Fals-Borda himself offered a clue on how to read and interpret the radicalism of those years:

Considering the justified iconoclastic beginnings of our commitment eighteen years ago, if we had wavered in our task, it would have been tantamount to surrender to old vested interests that were finding a way to blunt our initial concerned drives. It is true that some of us have been called back to governments, NGO's and universities, but it seems possible still to defend our purposes and to play our role of critical observers and practitioners even in those milieu.¹¹⁶

Yet, this is not the only aspect undermined when Fals-Borda's intellectual journey is presented as a leap from positive-functionalism into participation in peasant struggle,

¹¹⁴ Cendales, 'One sows the seed,' 39.

¹¹⁵ In 1979, discussing the possibility to publish the proceedings of the Symposium, Fals-Borda wrote to Michal Bodemann: 'I have been receiving considerable pressures from several quarters to proceed on the issues of action research, especially to establish its methodological validity. ... With the new materials on hand from Uppsala, plus the new reflections on Cartagena, we can certainly produce something attractive for the English-speaking public.' Fals-Borda's letter to Michal Bodemann, Department of Sociology, Toronto University, on 23 August 1979. ACH-UN, FOFB, Digital. Folder Relaciones_Internacionales, sub-folder Europa_Norteamérica/Canadá_154.

¹¹⁶ Fals-Borda, 'Notes on the present status of PAR,' 003.

from which PAR would emerge as a new method of social research. If PAR came to be considered later as a new paradigm in social research it was because the systematisation of Action Research meant a reconsideration of the role of science and its relationship with action. Then the production of knowledge became in turn a critical mechanism of the ideological leaning of the practitioners and their political praxis. In other words, Fals-Borda's critical praxis was a form of socio-political activism based on production socio-historical knowledge and epistemological analysis. Without such dynamic and critical interchange, PAR would not have transcended the epistemological (and perhaps the geographical) limits in which its initial practice was circumscribed.

Closing Chapter

In October 1962, concerned about the veil of silence that the media had agreed to draw over his book *La Violencia en Colombia* (LVC) (1962), Fals-Borda wrote to his friend Enrique Valencia, who was doing postgraduate studies in Mexico: ‘Ayer ya los periodistas se pusieron de acuerdo para no seguir discutiendo y haciéndose recriminaciones.’ The letter concluded with a note of scepticism: ‘Paz, paz ... Ojalá que el remedio esté pronto, que no es la simple paz.’¹

In contrast to the National Front’s attempts to consign to oblivion the history of *la Violencia* in order to restore peace amongst the political parties, Fals-Borda thought that facing it was a vital step towards overcoming its legacy. The remedy, as he wrote to Valencia, was not simply peace. As sociologist he was aware that the belief that peace could be obtained only by eliminating the remaining guerrilla groups and bandits after *la Violencia* was a fallacy. In the light of the much needed social-political reform, Fals-Borda saw the Alliance for Progress as a propitious development in the early 1960s. However, his analysis of the first decade of the U.S. developmental policy for Latin America confirmed the ‘inadequacy of recommended policies for coping with real problems’.² As Fals-Borda went on: ‘In spite of all the rational criticism that has been made of it, the tendency is to recommend more of the same and in increased measures.’³ By 1969, he was convinced that the only alternative was the revolutionary path; however, in which way and how to be a revolutionary was a question that led him

¹Letter on 5 October 1962. Archivo Central e Histórico de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Fondo Acumulado Facultad de Sociología (ACH-UN, FAFS), Box 1413, Folder 3_37.

²Fals-Borda, ‘Analysis of the First Development Decade.’ Archivo Central e Histórico de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Fondo Orlando Fals Borda, (ACH-UN, FOFB). Digital. Folder Libros, Sub-folder Libro_Subversion_Colombia_58.

³Fals-Borda, ‘Analysis of the First Development Decade,’ 58.

to a process consisting of socio-historical analysis, questioning his own discipline and religious beliefs and getting embedded in the reality of the less privileged, as has already been analysed in chapters 4–6.

Analysing Fals-Borda's journey from faith in developmental policies to a subversive stance has provided the opportunity to test the two central hypotheses of this dissertation:

The first hypothesis was that the analysis of Fals-Borda's intellectual and political career between 1948 and 1975 would provide the foundations for an ideological critique of the political violence in Colombia. As this research has demonstrated, Fals-Borda was one of the most important and consistent critics of political violence in Colombia, and not only the co-author of the first study of *la Violencia* (Chapters 2 and 3). The analysis of Fals-Borda's intellectual journey between 1948 and 1975 also allowed this research to identify three constitutive elements of Fals-Borda's intellectual career:

1) the ethical-theological roots of his professional and socio-political commitment to the transformation of society; 2) his approach to social reality based on historical analysis; 3) his search for a method to link scientific knowledge with empirical socio-political praxis. These three elements, analysed separately in chapters 4, 5 and 6, respectively, showed the complex interplay between theory and practice, out of which Fals-Borda shifted from the social analysis of the conflict to a more critical intellectual inquiry of the political violence in Colombia during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

By approaching Fals-Borda's intellectual career from this perspective, this research has indicated crucial continuities and challenged the rationale of other approaches based on the idea that Fals-Borda's intellectual career can be divided into clear-cut stages, as was discussed in Chapter 1. The earlier, formulaic approaches not only underplayed his role

as critic of the political violence in Colombia but also overlooked significant continuities in his intellectual career. As indicated in chapters 4–6, the motivations that prompted Fals-Borda to work within the status quo in the late 1950s were still the same that led him to rebel against it in the late 1960s, namely, to improve the appalling living conditions of the rural population through the combination of critical recovery of historical memory, dissemination of knowledge, implementation of technology, community participation and ethical principles.

An analysis of how these three elements — the ethical-theological, and socio-historical approaches to reality, and epistemological criticism — were put into practice in a material critique of the socio-economic and cultural conditions of production has to take into consideration the period 1978–1986, during which Fals-Borda went to live within the rural communities of the Atlantic Coast and wrote the four volumes of his *Historia Doble de la Costa*. During this period, he also developed the elements of Action-Research into a more cohesive, philosophically and politically grounded method: Participatory Action Research (PAR), his most elaborate critique of the political violence. As Fals-Borda observed: ‘En los cuatro tomos de la Historia Doble hay suficiente munición como para adelantar una prolongada guerra ideológica contra las injusticias del sistema actualmente vigente en Colombia. Ya existe la metodología para llegar a trabajar con ellos [los campesinos]: la investigación-acción participativa. Así se adquiere el poder del conocimiento.’⁴ Only at this stage did Fals-Borda define himself as an organic intellectual. Understanding PAR as just a method for adult education is missing the key element of Fals-Borda’s critique which is, more than ever,

⁴ ‘Fals-Borda: Un sociólogo de las regiones olvidadas,’ Fals-Borda interviewed by Rene Pérez, *Magazín 8 Días*, July (1985). Cutting. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Documentos_Personales, Recortes_prensa_3_04.

necessary today. This is a period of Fals-Borda's career that the author of this research will be most interested in studying in greater depth in future.

The second hypothesis suggested that W. Benjamin's 'Critique of the Violence' and 'Theses on the Concept History' would provide a theoretical framework able to support a recollection of fragments of critical thinking of the political violence in Colombia.

Up to this point, only hints have been dropped about the connections between the Benjaminian framework and the content of this dissertation. There are two reasons for this. On the one hand, the author has let the primary sources speak for themselves.

Despite possible correlations with Benjamin's works, this author wished to concentrate on original material. To paraphrase Seyla Benhabib, this research 'refused to stand outside its object'.⁵ On the other hand, as the project developed, understanding of the complexity of the relationship between the framework and the content increased. Insofar as the task of criticism is to be an act of cognition, the relationship cannot be captured in terms of the pragmatic description of details or individual ideas. On the contrary, as Benjamin put it, 'the critique of violence is the philosophy of its history — the "philosophy" of this history because the idea of its development makes possible a critical, discriminating and decisive approach to its temporal data.'⁶

This chapter, which is divided into two parts, brings together Fals-Borda's critique of the political violence in Colombia and the Benjaminian framework in two aspects.

First, it establishes a correlation between Benjamin's 'Critique of the Violence' and Fals-Borda's critique of *la Violencia*. Both were written before their authors engaged with Marxist critique. The correlation between elements of these two critiques sheds

⁵ Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundation of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 33.

⁶ Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of the Violence,' in vol. 1 of *Selected Writings 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), 251.

light on one of the critical aspects of the phenomenon known as *la Violencia*. In spite of having been largely documented, the overall picture still remains blurred. The CHCV's report is a case in point (Chapter 2). The CHCV's interpretative disagreements, although considerably enriching the literature on the conflict, illustrate that the debate on the legitimacy and legality of political violence during the mid-twentieth century requires historical elucidation.

Second, it brings together Benjamin's 'Theses on the Concept of History' and the basis of Fals-Borda's ideology critique. By looking at Fals-Borda's ideology critique through the lens of Benjamin's philosophy of history, the second part of this chapter:

- 1) highlights affinities between Benjamin's and Fals-Borda's historic dialectic;
- 2) suggests possible routes for further research on the three elements analysed in chapters 4–6.

1. The critique of *la Violencia*

Although it was a civil strife which left more than 200,000 dead, the conflict between 1948 and 1957 was reduced to two words, *la Violencia* — as if it were an anonymous force of destruction which exterminated life, property and also memory. Indeed, some survivors talked about *la Violencia* as a character: '*la Violencia*', they say, 'killed my family', '*la Violencia* burnt out my house', '*la Violencia* arrived in this town', '*la Violencia* took over'.⁷ This sort of ghostly anonymity of *la Violencia* runs in parallel with the idea that, as D. Bushnell put it, it was 'the result of peasant followers [who]

⁷ Guzman, et al., LVC, 57-61.

killed each other in the back country over issues that — apart from life and death and possession of spoils — were thoroughly irrelevant to their own situation’.⁸

Fals-Borda was far from understanding *la Violencia* this way. On the contrary, he was fully aware of the significant bearing that economic and socio-cultural issues had on the development of *la Violencia*; and that the key ideological and economic elements underlying *la Violencia* laid precisely behind what Bushnell called irrelevant issues to the peasants’ situation. However, this thesis does not suggest that the analysis of political ideologies may be the key element in understanding the historical meaning and impact of *la Violencia* — besides, Daniel Pecaú’s *Orden y violencia* (1987) has already described the inadequacies of searching for an all-embracing theory to explain the complexity of *la Violencia*.⁹ Therefore, what Gonzalo Sanchez called the ‘challenge of synthesis’ (1985) (Chapter 2), should not be interpreted as the aggregation of data provided by individual and localised case studies, but the identification of critical aspects which help to elucidate the past and are still relevant to understand the present of the Colombian conflict.

This chapter underlines two pioneering, although forgotten, contributions of Fals-Borda to the analysis of *la Violencia*: 1) the analysis of the ideological element; 2) the relation between the moral crisis and the question of justice. By analysing the ideological element, Fals-Borda was concerned with both the discourses that justified and legitimised violence (discourse context) and above all with the type of violence that is justified (which refers to the *legality* of the violence). As Benjamin pointed out: ‘The violence of an action can be assessed no more from its effects than from its end,

⁸ David Bushnell, ‘Colombia’, in *The Spanish Civil War, 1936–39: American Hemispheric Perspectives*, ed., Falcoff and Pike (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 194.

⁹ See Chapter 2 footnote 133.

but only from the law of its means.’¹⁰ The analysis of violence in relation to law and justice became crucial during the socio-political violence in the 1980s and 1990s in Colombia, although it was already addressed in Fals-Borda’s early analysis of *la Violencia*.¹¹

1.1. Hatred and fear as ideology

In 1939, after seven Conservatives were killed and many others injured during a political demonstration in the small town of Gachetá, Laureano Gómez wrote that ‘it might well be necessary for the Conservative party in opposition’ to adopt certain ‘fascist modalities of combat,’ but always with the expectation of being ‘essentially democratic once it returned to power’ (*El Siglo*, 19 January 1939). In 1951, after Laureano Gómez’s first year in power, 50,253 civilians were killed for political reasons. In 1952, Gómez declared: ‘El país será pacificado cueste lo que cueste’ (*El Siglo*, 9 January 1952). By the end of his administration the death toll had risen to 159,000. Laureano Gómez’s pacification was what Fals-Borda called ‘a peace that came to be somewhat close to the “peace of a cemetery”’.¹²

As a rural sociologist with a first-hand knowledge of peoples’ views of life, Fals-Borda approached the ideological element of politics in Colombia in a rather unusual fashion. For him, ideologies had little to do with discursive elements. Nor did they align with Marx’s mistaken or distorted representation of its social content nor with Mannheim’s intellectual structure. The power of ideologies, as drivers of action, lie in their connections with their socio-cultural ethos — an ‘ethos of passivity’ as Fals-Borda called it, which was the result in Colombia of elements such as seigneurial-type

¹⁰ Benjamin, ‘Critique,’ 247.

¹¹ See Chapter 2, footnote 130.

¹² Fals-Borda, *Subversion*, 65.

relations of production, hierarchical order, ascriptive political party identification and religious fanaticism.¹³

Therefore, rather than focusing on discourse analysis of political narratives, Fals-Borda identified as ideological the mechanisms of simplification through which the political was rendered into an irreconcilable dialectic between friend–enemy. Then, his concern was how such ideas could be passed on to the rural population, mainly illiterate and resistant to intellectual debates. In a paper presented to the National Institute of Medicine, in 1960, Fals-Borda looked at hatred and enmity as primitive, though effective, forms of political propaganda — a rhetoric of hatred during *la Violencia* helped create enmity since state-approved violence needed enemies for its legitimacy.¹⁴ Then, amidst an atmosphere of conspiracy, the sophisticated political rhetoric of urban elites was condensed into incendiary slogans such as ‘blood and fire,’ ‘to the charge,’ ‘intrepid action’ and ‘take your weapons’— which inflamed the passions of the peasantry. Prior to *la Violencia*, two decades of simmering hate had created a scenario of conspiracy and fear whereby people accepted violence as inevitable. More important than the analysis of countless explicit fascist-sounding articles and columns in the Conservative newspapers was the proliferation of an inherently aggressive media, which familiarised readers with the idea that political disagreement could only be solved by violence.¹⁵

¹³ Fals-Borda, *Peasant Society*, 245.

¹⁴ Fals-Borda, ‘Soluciones sociales para los problemas del odio y la violencia’ (Paper presented at the National Institute of Medicine and Psychology, Bogotá, Colombia, on 6 October 1960). Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Fondo Camilo Torres Restrepo, Box 7, Folder, 7.1. Documents_74-81.

¹⁵ There were seven Conservative newspapers in 1932. Twelve new ones were founded from 1932 to 1935. Their aim was to keep the electorate in fighting trim during the period of electoral abstention declared by the Conservative directory. Between 1936 and 1939 thirty-one local and national newspapers were founded, twenty of which were openly Fascist-orientated. See Cesar Augusto Ayala, ‘Trazos y trozos sobre el uso y abuso de la Guerra Civil Española en Colombia,’ *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura*, vol. 38, no 2 (2011): 111-152.

What infuriated the political leadership about the book LVC was that it questioned the mythology of the ‘historical dignity of the parties’ and hence showed that the history of *la Violencia* was not, as those politicians implied, one of unfolding inevitability.¹⁶ Nor was it only the augmentation of previous violence. Instead, it was related to the vested interests of the contemporary leadership: on the one hand, the radicalised Conservative Directorate seconded by sectarian elements of the Church; on the other, the Liberal leadership which called its followers to armed resistance and then abandoned them (the peasantry) to their own fate. The state of *total conflict*, described by Fals-Borda, was irrational — but the instigation of fanaticism and hatred was far from being so.

Fals-Borda’s approach contradicts one of the most deep-rooted myths of Colombian modern historiography: that the history of Colombian violence is a ‘paradox’. As mentioned in the introduction, once it was introduced by Robert Dix (1986), and Gonzalo Sanchez used it in a report of the Commission of Studies on the Violence in Colombia (1987), the concept of ‘paradox’ became so popularised that a number of researchers put forward their own.¹⁷ An interesting example of this approach is R. Peñaranda’s:

Colombia combines a state of law, apparently solid — which formally embodies high levels of civil liberty and democratic process — with a persistent, generalized situation of violence that makes it one of the most

¹⁶ Fals-Borda, prologue LVC (1963), 56.

¹⁷ David Bushnell, *The Making of Colombia: A Nation in spite of Itself* (California: University of California Press, 1993), viii; Helen Delpar, ‘Continuity and Paradox: Recent Writing on Colombia,’ *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1989): 2. In 1993, Gonzalo Sánchez, director of the Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales (IEPRI); wrote an article entitled ‘Las diez paradojas y encrucijadas de la investigación histórica en Colombia’. This article in reality has nothing to do with paradoxes, instead it focuses on ten relevant challenges for researchers of the socio-political conflict in Colombia. For instance ‘paradox’ number seven states: ‘Ha habido un demostrable avance en algunas ramas de la historia, por ejemplo, en la historia económica y social, pero un abultado retraso de las historias de la cultura, de las ideologías, de la vida cotidiana y de las mentalidades.’ Sanchez, *Historia Crítica*, no. 8 (1993): 75-80. See also Malcolm Deas, ‘Reflections on Political Violence in Colombia,’ in *Legitimization of violence*, ed., David E. Apter (London; Houndmills: Macmillan 1997), 389; Carlos Miguel Ortiz, ‘Historiografía sobre la Violencia,’ in *La historia al final del milenio: ensayos de historiografía colombiana y latinoamericana*, ed., Bernardo Tovar Zambrano (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1994), 382; Fernán Gonzalez’s *Poder y Violencia en Colombia*. (Bogotá: CINEP, 2014), 55.

convulsed societies in the world. A country that prides itself on having the most consistent civic and democratic tradition in Latin America is the very country that has the most persistent and prolonged guerrilla history in the hemisphere. In Colombia, democracy and violence have coexisted for a long time, until the two phenomena have become, paradoxically, two faces of the same coin.¹⁸

The paradox, if any, as Fals-Borda noted, lies in the political historiography which had portrayed a long tradition of *civilismo* zealously preserved by the political elites. As J. Martz put it: ‘Colombians are vocal in their advocacy of democratic principles. Intellectuals are often well-read in the great political philosophers of revolutionary France and the United States. However, there is a delusion that the declaration of democratic beliefs will transmit ideals into reality.’¹⁹ A few studies recently published have suggested how ineffectual is this paradox-centred approach in shedding light on the complexities of the Colombian conflict, let alone on *la Violencia*.²⁰ By analysing the links between the regimes under which *la Violencia* happened, these studies have shown that the first wave of *la Violencia* was contemporary with the attempts to re-establish a totalitarian regime reminiscent of the Conservative Regime, 1885–1930. Furthermore, inspired by Francoist ideology, the conservative leadership and important members of the ecclesiastic hierarchy appealed to such national symbols as the Church, the family and the Spanish heritage after which it was inevitable that the beginnings of *la Violencia* acquired overtones of holy war. It was preached in the pulpits and the media that violence that promotes evil must be met with violence that promotes good — as the author of this research has already analysed elsewhere.²¹

¹⁸ Ricardo Peñaranda, ‘Conclusion: Surveying the Literature on the Violence,’ in Bergquist, Charles, et al., eds. *Violence in Colombia. The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Wilmington, Delaware: SR Books, 1991), 294.

¹⁹ John Martz, *Colombia: a contemporary political survey*. 1962 (Westport: Greenwood Press 1975), 9.

²⁰ César Augusto Ayala Diago, ed. et al., *Mataron a Gaitán: 60 años* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Dirección Académica, 2010); Rubén Sierra, ed. *La Regeneración conservadora*, (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional, 2012). Also, Francisco Gutiérrez Sanin, *El orangután con sacoleva: cien años de democracia y represión en Colombia, 1910–2010* (Bogotá: IEPRI, 2014).

²¹ The pulpit was an efficient instrument of political indoctrination. The pastoral letters, in particular those of bishops Builes and Gonzalez, which were published in all conservative newspapers and read in a many great of churches all over the country, are testimonies of intoxicating religious fanaticism. They were

On the other hand, the use of *la Violencia* to name either the traditional bi-partisan antagonism or the peasantry's struggle for land, confuses the specific features that Fals-Borda had already identified as early as 1962. Ignoring this radical disjunction between traditional bipartisan antagonism, and the strategy of annihilation of political enemies unleashed by the party in power to retain the state apparatus, misses the key aspect of *la Violencia*. The lack of a precise chronology goes hand in hand with the absence of historical information which in turn is reflected in the absence of memorials, or a remembrance day, a policy of victims' reparation, an official acknowledgement of political responsibilities or a condemnation of the crimes against humanity perpetrated not only during *la Violencia* but during the next sixty years of conflict.²² 'When the National Front was crafted,' as J. Henderson recalled it, 'Gómez and the rest admitted and apologized for the oratorical excesses that were taken as signalling their approval of physical excess on the part of their followers.'²³ The scale of *la Violencia* certainly required more than token gestures to rebuild a war-torn country. This lack of political will to deal with the past (as indicated in Chapter 3 in relation to the book *La Violencia en Colombia* (1962)) reflects the attitudes of a civil society that has become indifferent or accustomed to violence and a political elite deeply reluctant to hold a serious historical debate. These are two sides of the same coin: collective amnesia.

analysed by the author of this dissertation during the bibliographical work for this research. See Juan Mario Díaz, 'Remembrance and Collusion: The ideological role of the Church during the time of *la Violencia*: Colombia 1948 – 57,' (paper presented at the Annual Conference St Mary's University Twickenham: Church, Theology and War, London 9th Sept 2014); 'Spiritualising Violence? Religion and politics during the time of *la Violencia*, Colombia 1948– 57,' (paper presented at the Research Group in Ministerial Theology – Roehampton University, 9th Dec 2014); 'The ideological impact of the Spanish Civil War on Colombia, 1930 – 1957,' (paper presented at Cañada Blanch Centre Research Students' Discussion Group, LSE, London, 29th Jan 2015); 'The echoes of the Spanish Civil War in the political conflict in Colombia: The ideological impact of the Spanish Civil War on Colombia, 1930 – 1958,' (paper presented at Hispanic Research Centre, Roehampton University, London 26st Jan 2016).

²² See figures from the National Centre of Historical Memory: chapter 5, footnote 112.

²³ Henderson, *Modernization*, 420.

1.2. The loss of the monopoly of legitimate violence

‘The critique of violence,’ Benjamin states, ‘is the philosophy of its history’. This critical approach does not mean considering specific circumstances in which violence (‘Gewalt’ means force as well as violence) is applied, but in analysing its relationship to law and justice.²⁴ This immediately raises two questions about whether Benjamin’s critique shows in a new light Fals-Borda’s analysis of *la Violencia*, a phenomenon which has been seen as synonymous with lawlessness and chaos. First, because Benjamin relates his discussion to ‘contemporary European conditions’.²⁵ Second, because from the legal point of view *la Violencia* paints a state of utmost abnormality: the institutionalisation of lawlessness and impunity as the means to preserve what has been established as law, which creates in turn a circle of total and futile violence.

Perhaps an answer should start by analysing the signs of such abnormality. Few words convey the meaning of *la Violencia* as powerfully as ‘Chulavitas’, the conservative police, and ‘Pájaros’, the para-military gang at the service of the Conservative directorate, both bitterly recalled as depraved criminals. Their almighty power to terrorise vast areas of Colombia during *la Violencia* and afterwards contrasts with the scarcity of studies.²⁶

However, their existence underlines the problematic nature of *la Violencia*: the point at which legal subjects sanction violence for their own private ends. Benjamin’s critique of ‘the law of police’ and the ‘military law’ render intelligible the legal problem embodied

²⁴ Benjamin, *Critique* 236.

²⁵ Benjamin, *Critique*, 238. The text was a response to the discussion in the journal of religious socialism between Martin Buber and Paul Tillich after the general strikes in Berlin in 1921.

²⁶ Remarkable exceptions are Guzmán, et al., LVC. Javier Guerrero Barón, *Los años del olvido: Boyacá y los orígenes de la Violencia* (1991); Gonzalo Sánchez and Donny Meertens, *Bandoleros, gamonales y campesinos: El caso de la violencia en Colombia* (1983); Darío Betancourt and Martha García, *Matones y cuadrilleros: origen y evolución de la violencia en el occidente colombiano, 1946–1965* (1991); Eric Hobsbawm, ‘La anatomía de “la Violencia en Colombia”’, (1985); and the historic novel *Cóndores no entierran todos los días*, (1985) by Gustavo Álvarez Gardeazábal.

in the law-making function of violence. Despite the difference between the historic conditions described by Benjamin and Fals-Borda, the comparisons between their analyses are most illuminating.

The institutions of civil society bind individuals to the ruling power by consent and the state, by controlling the monopoly on legitimate violence, reserves its coercive power. Nevertheless, coercive institutions of society such as armies, police and law courts must themselves win general consent from the people ‘if they are to operate effectively so the opposition between coercion and consent can be to some extent deconstructed’.²⁷

In contrast, in Colombia during the time of *la Violencia*, both the military force and the police became decisive political forces. Created during the Liberal Republic, 1930–1946, the political police, under the orders of the executive and local governors, became crucial in the developments of *la Violencia*. Re-organisation of the police as a national force was undertaken by the Conservative government in 1948 as the principal political mechanism to fight their political adversaries.²⁸ Thus, the nationalisation of the former regional or local police (in order to preserve the state) remained in irreconcilable opposition with both the monopoly of legality and the legal ends they aimed to preserve. The law of the police turned into predatory violence.²⁹ How this explains the legal crisis underlying *la Violencia* was already discussed by Fals-Borda.

Based on LVC’s painstaking description of *la Violencia* in different regions, Fals-Borda used ‘structural cleavage’ to describe a legal and political system eroded by mechanisms to cover up political crimes.³⁰ As he explained: ‘Los grupos (al nivel estatal, de los

²⁷ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London; New York: Verso, 1991), 113-114.

²⁸ Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez, ‘la profesionalización military en Colombia II: el período de la Violencia,’ *Estudios Políticos*, no. 2 (1988): 10-14.

²⁹ Benjamin’s criticised the police’s ‘all-pervasive, ghostly presence in the life of civilised states.’ whose ordinances allowed it to rampage against civilians and thinkers (from which the state is not protected by law). ‘Critique,’ 243.

³⁰ Paul Oquist use the concept of partial collapse of the State to describe the exacerbation of the *la violencia* as the result of the conflict between the political elite to control the State. *Violencia. Conflicto y*

partidos nacionales y de la maquinaria política vecinal) han legitimado en el agente de Policía un nuevo rol, un rol violento, distinto al contemplado en los códigos ... éste se institucionaliza y sanciona positivamente, dentro de la forma institucional policiva.’³¹

This dichotomy between the legitimacy of the ends and the legality of the means, which in turn creates a general state of impunity, became functional for the group in power.

The role of the police then is to secure the actual ends that the state pursues but can no longer attain through the legal system. As Fals-Borda carried on: ‘En el caso colombiano, no habría disfunción sino en aquellas estructuras sociales que presenten divorcio entre los fines formales y los derivados, y especialmente por grupos que logran deformar los status-roles sin salirse del marco institucional formal.’³²

Lest one be distracted by Fals-Borda’s use of functionalist jargon one should recall that his analysis was also a response to the functionalist school of Turner and Gluckman, for whom *la Violencia* was a functional process since it did not destroy the integration at national level.³³ Such simplification, said Fals-Borda, not only fell short of understanding the phenomenon but also of proving the theory.

Although forgotten mainly because of its functionalist framework, the question posed by Fals-Borda about the framework — for assessing the legality of violent means — was of far-reaching consequence. According to M. Weber’s formal legal rationality, the main role of authority and police in society is to enforce law, with bureaucratic ‘dominance of a spirit of formalistic impersonality’, that is, to ensure the ‘rule of law, not of men’. Since the police is to ordinary citizens perhaps the most conspicuous

Política en Colombia (Bogotá: Biblioteca Banco Popular, 1978), 12; 45. In 1987, D. Pecaut, explained this partial collapse as a progressive disintegration of the state; that is, its inability to mediate between and cope with the interest of the political groups and the economic and industrial sectors. See chapter 2, section 3.3.

³¹ Fals-Borda, ‘El Conflicto, la violencia y la estructura social colombiana,’ in LVC, 434.

³² Fals-Borda, ‘El Conflicto,’ 435.

³³ Fals-Borda, ‘The role of violence in the break with traditionalism: The Colombian case,’ 27.

agency of the state, its authority and legitimacy are derived by exerting legitimate violence, not by simply protecting civilians' lives and possessions.³⁴ However, as Fals-Borda argued, the Colombian state, in spite of conforming constitutionally to the Weberian rationale, changed the status-role of police in order to achieve practical ends. The military rule during the second wave of *la Violencia* would do the same with the army, which also became an agent of disorder and crime, but without losing its function as legal institution.³⁵ Narratives that depict *la Violencia* as a conflict between Liberal and Conservative peasants overlook that the self-defence guerrillas understood their struggle as a war on the State.

Finally, it seems there is after all a way to approach Colombia's history of sustained violence as a paradox. In the introduction to the new edition of his *Ideology*, Terry Eagleton suggests that the point about the paradoxical nature of political violence had already been made effectively by the ancient Greek tragedians. In Euripides's *The Bacchae*, Pentheus, the unbending ruler of Thebes, refuses to accept Dionysus, god of riotous living, into the city, and 'by savagely repressing him not only triggers some atrocious bloodshed, but turns himself into an image of the very terror he abhors'. In contrast, Eagleton observes, in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, with greater wisdom than Pentheus, 'Athens at the close of the play welcomes the marauding Furies into the city, transforming them into the *Eumenides* or Kindly Ones who will contribute to its defence.'³⁶

³⁴ See Max Weber, 'The Power Position of Bureaucracy,' in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed., H. Gerth and W. Mills (London: Routledge and K Paul, 1970), 232-234.

³⁵ Fals-Borda, 'El Conflicto,' 433.

³⁶ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: New York: Verso, 2007), xii.

2. Fals-Borda's critique of the ideology: routes for further research

Fals-Borda's long-term systematic effort to subvert the established order, as indicated in chapters 4–6, was a critical yet imaginative process. In contrast to the criticism of the Enlightenment rationality which expounds on the world as it is, the critique of ideology presumes that 'those subject to oppression experience *even now* hopes and desires which could only be realistically fulfilled by a transformation of their material conditions'.³⁷ Fals-Borda needed considerable innovative thinking to provide an alternative option to the assumption that guerrilla warfare alone could transform material conditions in Latin America. Chapters 4–6 approached three aspects which were found essential in laying the basis for Fals-Borda's critique. This dissertation's final task is then to indicate how they developed in Fals-Borda's actual critique and to suggest paths for further analysis.

2.1. Profane theology

The word 'profane' (from the Latin *profanus*) in English means 'not relating to religion or spiritual matters; unholy, not consecrated' or 'having or indicating contempt, irreverence or disrespect for a divinity or something sacred'.³⁸ In the Spanish language, apart from these two meanings, there is yet a third one: *profano* is 'a layperson: unfamiliar, inexperienced or amateur'.³⁹

None of these expresses the meaning used in the title of the section. *Profane* has been used here in its most literal meaning of 'outside the temple' (from *pro* 'before' and

³⁷ Eagleton, *Ideology*, xii.

³⁸ Cambridge Advanced Dictionary, 'Profane', 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Also, Collins English Dictionary, 'Profane' (Great Britain: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007).

³⁹ Diccionario de la Lengua Española, 'Profano', 23rd ed. (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 2014).

fanum ‘temple’).⁴⁰ That is, a theology concerned with transcendence, faith and hope in the secular realm. Benjamin’s account of the chess-playing automaton, in the first of his ‘Theses’, illustrates the dialectical character of profane theology in his historiography: ‘The puppet, called “historical materialism”, is to win every time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the service of theology, which today, as we know, is small and ugly and has to keep out of sight’ (Thesis I).

Chapter 4 showed that the 1966 World Conference of the WCC made a decisive impact on Fals-Borda’s critical thinking. Theologian and sociologist Lalive d’Epinay summarised the Conference’s concerns regarding the role of traditional theology in one sentence: ‘After 2000 years in which Christianity was wisdom and power, now it has become foolish and a stumbling block.’⁴¹ He was writing in times of global challenges such as the nuclear threat, the war in Vietnam and poverty of two-thirds of the world population. Hence the realisation, that renewal of the Church’s mission must include concern for the people involved in revolutionary struggles for social justice, became central.

Benjamin’s description of theology as a chess-master — sitting inside the cabinet operating the controls and playing the chess game — serves as a useful analogy for Fals-Borda’s ethical thinking, particularly after his excommunication from the Presbyterian Church of Colombia in 1972 (Chapter 6).

In his evaluation of one of the Rosca Foundation’s projects supported by the Dutch Churches’ Foundation *Cross the Bridge*, Fals-Borda wrote: ‘The fact that you gave this support to an organisation independent from the local Colombian churches is worth underlining. This is a lesson for those who still claim that the best way of proclaiming

⁴⁰ José Ferrater Mora, ‘Profano,’ *Diccionario de Filosofía*, vol 3. Barcelona: Ariel, 2015.

⁴¹ Lalive d’Epinay, (Minutes of discussion section IV, sub-section 1, on 19 July 1966, World Conference on Church and Society, WCC). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Congresos_Asociaciones, Sub-folder Congreso_Mundial_Iglesias_65.

the Gospel is to assist directly the pastoral and traditional missionary activities.’⁴² This was a criticism of the usual style of church assistance: ‘churches helping churches’. As his report carried on: ‘Had you gone through the usual ecclesiastical channels in this country, you would have acquired, as a partner, an institution loaded with the most conservative views, far from the genuine interests of the people in need, adept at giving moral support to the system of injustice that is so blatant in our society.’⁴³ This clearly reflected the antagonism between Fals-Borda and the National Synod; however, it also pointed to another notable element: his criticism of the churches’ desperate attempt to get better results within the framework of the old paradigm.

The feud over a second grant of US \$75,000 from the National Committee on Development of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (NCSDP) to the Rosca Foundation (which had to be withdrawn after protests from the Presbyterian Synod of Colombia), stressed the ethical and theological differences between traditional Protestantism and that which had fostered the ecumenical atmosphere of Theology of Liberation. Henceforth, Fals-Borda’s social praxis would develop outside ecclesiastical borders.

In 1973, the Rosca Foundation carried out research on the experience of participation in the Pentecostal community of El Retiro de los Indios in Cereté, Córdoba (the area of the Atlantic Coast where Fals-Borda had been working with the peasant movement ANUC. See Chapter 6). The research, coordinated by the sociologist María Cristina Salazar, Fals-Borda’s wife, started after some leaders of ANUC expressed their concern about the negative influence of Pentecostal sects on the peasantry in the region.⁴⁴ The study

⁴² Project of assistance in the area of communication and social action: promotion of justice, for US \$20,000 in two years. Letter from Fals-Borda to the Board of the Foundation in Utrecht, The Netherlands, on 4 June 1975. Fals-Borda, ‘Evaluation La Rosca.’ ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Movimientos_Populares, Sub-folder Fundarco_Aternativa, Revista Alterantiva_50.

⁴³ Fals-Borda, ‘Evaluation La Rosca,’ 50.

⁴⁴ Salazar, María Cristina, ‘Una Comunidad Pentecostal en El Retiro de los Indios, Cereté-Córdoba,’ 1973, 1. Archivo Personal Orlando Fals-Borda, Banco de la República, Red de Bibliotecas, Montería. Caja 13, Carpeta 06 fol. 4079-4127.

concluded that Pentecostal sects had a negative effect upon education leading to political awareness and empowerment of any rural population subjected to socio-economic exploitation and in need of effective political organisation.⁴⁵ What is important at this stage is not the process of observation and analysis that led Salazar to that conclusion, but the theological and historical framework which supported the study.

Salazar introduced her analysis by linking the then major topic of theological debate on social justice among Protestant theologians and sociologists (such as Rubem Alvez, Lalive d'Epiney, Richard Shaull and Fals-Borda) together with a comparative historical study of the development of Protestantism in Colombia, Chile and Brazil.⁴⁶ Her aim was to frame that particular community within the bigger picture of the social role of Protestantism in Latin America.⁴⁷ The theological lines which Salazar followed were those of a criticism of the traditional conservatism of Protestant churches whose members were uninterested in the socio-political destiny of their countries.⁴⁸ This issue was discussed in Shaull's 1964 article 'The New Form of Diaspora Church' which became the focus of serious attention at the Conference of Church and Society held in Uruguay, 1967. At this conference, Lalive d'Epiney concluded that the reactionary role of Protestantism in Latin America (this sort of 'Latin American McCarthyism' or *passive socio-political strike*) resulted from the attempt to shift the Protestant groups too quickly towards structures and conventions that had dominated the older churches in Latin America. These older churches were founded on the same principles as the

⁴⁵ Salazar, María Cristina, 'Una Comunidad Pentecostal,' 33. Caja 13, Carpeta 06 fol. 4113.

⁴⁶ Waldo A. César, Richard Shaull, Orlando Fals-Borda and Beatriz Muniz de Souza, *Protestantismo e Imperialismo na América Latina*, (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1968).

⁴⁷ Salazar, María Cristina, 'Una Comunidad Pentecostal,' 2-15. Caja 13, Carpeta 06 fol. 4080-4095.

⁴⁸ Salazar, María Cristina, 'Una Comunidad Pentecostal,' 19. Caja 13, Carpeta 06 fol. 4099.

traditional hacienda in Latin America: 'they offer men a possible escape from their historic situation, from their responsibility as men, from their solidarity with other men.'⁴⁹

For Rubem Alvez, the roots of the problem of churches' conservatism were not only socio-cultural. They were part of the spiritual inheritance of Latin American Protestantism; that is, convert the individual then society will be transformed.

Social ethics, based on this principle, can hardly produce categories for understanding problems of a structural nature.⁵⁰ For Alvez, the mutation of the political character of Calvinism (transformation of the world for the glory of God) into individualistic ethics based on the consciousness of being morally different or superior has stripped Calvinism in Latin America of its social ethics.⁵¹ Hence, for the Latin American Protestant, man does not change his world; he rejects it: 'Criticism of the structures is avoided and criticism of the individual takes its place. It is the same ideology which in the U.S. ascribes the plight of the poor to the fact that "they do not try hard enough". For this reason, the utopian promises of Protestantism reveal themselves today to be unmistakably ideological.'⁵²

According to the emerging Theology of Liberation, the question 'What is the role of the churches in Latin America?' was inseparable from the question 'What social structures are in place?'. The traditional areas of contention that had divided Catholic and Protestant theologians in Latin America were no longer important in the early 1970s.

⁴⁹Submission, tutelage and belief in the value of face-to-face relationships; that is the acceptance that power and authority has a religious source (an eternal or absolute value), and the belief that the Hacienda owner (patron) will always be available in time of need. Lalive d'Epinay, 'Protestant Churches and the Latin American Revolution,' (Paper at the Conference Iglesia y Sociedad en América Latina, 1967), 1. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Congresos y Asociaciones, Sub-folder Congreso_Mundial_Iglesias_382; 384.

⁵⁰ Fals-Borda, 'O Desafio da Civilização Moderna,' in *Protestantismo*, 75-78.

⁵¹ For Alvez, Protestantism in Latin America perceives social problems as the sum of individual problems. The reason, according to Alvez, is that 'instead of understanding the antagonism between man and structures in dialectical terms, the Protestantism interpreted in term of dualism.' Alvez Rubem, 'Protestantism in Latin America: its ideological function and utopian possibilities,' *The Ecumenical Review* vol. XXII, no.1 (1970): 11.

⁵² Alvez Rubem, 'Protestantism,' 11.

The point at which they converged was the criticism of structural injustice, which often led to the premature death of the underprivileged and the exploited, injustice directly connected to or tolerated by institutional and legitimate violence.

Recent research on the Magdalena Medio region in Colombia has shown that many social movements such as the Popular Organisation of Women started as base communities during the emergence of Liberation Theology in the early 1970s, and later on became independent (as with this organisation in 1988); however, the principles and values of such organisations go back to their origins.⁵³ The research underlines the role of Participatory Action Research in peace-building and democratic participation in the Magdalena Medio region — an area of intensive conflict with a daunting record of human rights violations. The impact of Liberation Theology on rural and popular communities and the contributions of many anthropologists, pedagogists and social scientists remain to be researched.

2.2. The redemptive dreams of the elders

The first edition of *Subversion and Social Change* (1967) was written, as Fals-Borda recalled, with a sense of urgency, as if it were to rescue a memory in danger of sinking into oblivion — something like ‘the tiger’s leap into the past’ or trying to ‘seize a momentary flashing image at the moment of its recognisability’ (Thesis XIV). The book was an implicit criticism of the partisan historiographical tradition that had embellished the biographies of the heroes of the Independence, 1810–1819, and party leaders.

⁵³ Carlos Enrique Angarita, *Imaginarios religiosos de personas en situación de desplazamiento en la región del Magdalena Medio* (Bogotá: Universidad Javeriana, Facultad de Teología, 2006). Based on this research Laurent Hernández made the documentary ‘El retorno del Boga,’ shot on location in the Magdalena Medio region (2015).

History that was bound up in the ‘once upon a time’ and showed things ‘as they really were’, said Benjamin, ‘was the strongest narcotic of the century.’⁵⁴

Fals-Borda’s *Subversion* was the first academic approach of its sort in Colombian historiography, and still remains an unparalleled experiment. As mentioned in Chapter 5, *Subversion* was more than an attempt to write an unabridged history of rebellion: it was *teletic* or projective research.⁵⁵ *Subversion* questioned the rigid image of the past transmitted by the chroniclers of the epic antagonism between two political parties. Within a dialectical framework, Fals-Borda set out the recollection of social phenomena as expressions of social transformation — he even alluded to ‘minor’ historical events such as the artisan rebellion after the French Revolution of 1848 and General Uribe Uribe’s Guild Socialism, 1910–1914.⁵⁶ As Benjamin put it, ‘the historical materialist must be aware of the most inconspicuous of all transformations.’⁵⁷ His analysis of the teleological, although frustrated, endeavours to transform society, radically dissociated Fals-Borda’s historiography from the process of transmission carried out by partisan politician-historians.

How this *teletic* research on *subversion* became integral to the interests of exploited classes can be fully analysed in Fals-Borda’s project of economic and social history on the Atlantic Coast. An episode recalled by Fals-Borda illustrates the importance of critical recovery of historic collective memory. Working with the peasant movement in Córdoba, Fals-Borda noted that knowledge about peasant struggles in the first decades

⁵⁴ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 463 [N3,4].

⁵⁵ From the Greek ‘telos’: ‘ultimate object or aim’. Also, ‘the end, fulfilment, completion.’ Fals-Borda, ‘The ideological biases of North Americans studying Latin America,’ (Lecture at University of Columbia, New York, 2 December, 1966). ACH-UN, FAFS, 1966. Box 1455, Folder 08.

⁵⁶ Like Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, Uribe Uribe was assassinated in the centre of Bogotá the day he was to present the Bill for labour reform in the Congress. The responsibility for the crime remains unknown. Fals-Borda, *Subversion*, 127.

⁵⁷ Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Concept of History,’ in *Selected Writings 1938–1940*, vol. 4, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), 390. Henceforth quoted in-text as: Thesis, number.

of the twentieth century was missing from Colombian history: ‘This was not due to any lack of historians (the National Academy has been brimming with them) but to a lack of specific class utility for that type of information. Those who first became genuinely interested in learning about those struggles were the peasants when they were able to organize themselves and set up the Land Users Association in the 1970’s.’⁵⁸ Despite the rapid increase of peasant organisations in the region of Córdoba, ‘the first takeovers of unused land from the big landowners were mostly unsuccessful,’ Fals-Borda recalled, ‘until history came to the rescue in the shape of one elderly woman.’⁵⁹

She, Juana Julia Guzmán, then 82 years of age in 1972, had been one of the main leaders of the belligerent peasant leagues established in Córdoba in the 1920s. Forgotten by historians — in fact, by everybody — she was rediscovered in the slums of Montería by peasant cadres and concerned intellectuals cooperating with the Land Association. Informed of the current struggle, Juana Julia became a symbol and pillar of the new peasant movement. Subsequent contacts with her uncovered a great wealth of knowledge and experience: in fact, her efforts as a young activist had helped found the first Socialist Party in Colombia and the first bastions of peasant power in the Atlantic Coast. Her recollections and her private papers, which she had carefully treasured (as had her elder companions who survived), furnished the peasant movement with the historical and moral perspective it needed to justify politically and ideologically its drive for land for the landless.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Fals-Borda, ‘The Importance of Research in Rural Development in Colombia,’ (Paper requested by the Swedish Agency for Research Co-operation with Developing Countries (SAREC) to be presented in the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, FAO, 1979). ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Correspondencia_Internacional, sub-folder Suecia_SAREC_Correspondencia_1978_18.

⁵⁹ Fals-Borda, ‘The Importance of Research,’ 19.

⁶⁰ Fals-Borda, ‘The Importance of Research,’ 19–20.

This is one of the many examples of how critical recovery of memory, within the framework of action-research, was useful for structural change. As Fals-Borda observed, the elders' memories were the only quotable source on the origins of rural syndicalism and the Socialist Party in those communities: 'She [Juana Julia] opened the coffers where she kept the material souvenirs of her past struggles. In spite of the ravages of time and damp, they contained the first treasures of a genuine people's museum, like the silk armbands with the three eights — a socialist aspiration of the period.'⁶¹

Highly relevant, and only recently analysed, were the illustrated pamphlets showing the history of the peasant struggles in the region.⁶² Written collectively by the members of the Rosca Foundation and the local peasants, these pamphlets proved to be very successful in bringing the history of the region to a wider public. This evidence of the take-over of 15,000 hectares of unused land by the peasant movement during the years 1972–1974 and its re-distribution among destitute farmers for growing food, underlined a key feature of action-research: recovering 'living testimonies' about forgotten struggles with which to challenge the gaps in partisan historic records. As Fals-Borda stated: 'Para ellos y con ellos [los campesinos] escribí. No fue para ayudar a los poderosos. Para éstos se ha escrito otra versión de la historia colombiana, la elitista o académica, mucho más conocida que la otra, lo del pueblo, ambas igualmente merecedoras de atención y respeto. También el pueblo tiene sus intelectuales, cronistas, ancianos y valiosos archivos de baúl.'⁶³

⁶¹ Fals-Borda, 'The application of Participatory-Action Research in Latin America,' in Martin Albrow and Elizabeth King, ed., *Globalization, Knowledge and Society: Reading from International Sociology* (London: SAGE publications, 1990), 91.

⁶² Fundación del Caribe, *Historia Gráfica de la lucha por la tierra en la Costa Atlántica*, illustrated by Uliyanov Chalarka (Montería: Fundación del Sinú, 1985). Joanne Rappaport has analysed the collective process of writing of these narratives. See 'El cobarde no hace historia: Orlando Fals-Borda y la doble historia de la costa del Caribe' (Paper presented at a seminar in CINEP, Bogotá, 7 July 2015).

⁶³ 'Fals-Borda: Un sociólogo de las regiones olvidadas,' Fals-Borda interviewed by Rene Pérez, *Magazín 8 Días*, June (1985). Cutting. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Documentos_Personales, sub-folder Recortes_prensa_3_04.

Fals-Borda's historical research was in Benjamin's words an attempt to seize 'irretrievable images of the past which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognise itself as intended in that image' (Thesis V). The history that subversive historiography tells is the history of the utopian dream of the past — the aspiration to happiness for everyone, including the poor, in a better social order. Fals-Borda's notion of *subversion* was indissolubly bound up with the idea of redemption.

2.3. Participation as counter-discourse

Perhaps, after all, it may be argued that dwelling on Participatory Action Research's (PAR) origins is to miss its impressive development after the mid-1980s, and how successful it was in modelling popular systems of education like that of the Australian Aborigines who adopted Fals-Borda as son of their clan.⁶⁴ This was just one of Fals-Borda's many others gratifying experiences worldwide as developer of PAR.⁶⁵ Moreover, Fals-Borda himself recognised that 'ideas have a dynamic of their own, one just sows them' and hence when utopian ideas are 'institutionalized at the universities

⁶⁴ Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart (2000) translated Fals-Borda's book *To Praxis* into the aboriginal languages, and this is how the idea of the living school with Aboriginal teachers came to transform the situation in Northern Australia. A delegation of Aborigines went to PAR Congress in Canada 1984, and 'it turned out,' wrote Fals-Borda, 'that they knew everything about our ideas. This was impressive. Then they invited me to go to Australia. The Aborigines welcomed me there and made me son of the clan, which was beautiful! They made the ceremony for me. I spent a week with them, and they invited me to fish with them. We are all descendants of crocodiles, and they gave me a very beautiful name, Gamba, which means the encounter of waters, the water of the sea with the fresh water of the rivers.' Lola Cendales et al, 'One sows the seed, but it has its own dynamics: An interview with Orlando Fals-Borda,' *International Journal of Action Research* 1, no. 1 (2005): 37.

⁶⁵ In the 1980s PAR was used by the Sandinista revolution for the programme of adult education and agrarian reform, with the collaboration of Fals-Borda. John Elliott and Peter Reason (2000) working with teachers in England; Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart (2000) in Australia with the Aborigines; Myles Horton in the Appalachians in Tennessee with groups of impoverished miners (Horton & Freire, 1990); in the National University Colombia, the Program of Relationships between the National University and the Community (PRIAC) although initially involving mainly social workers and sociologists, afterwards the agronomists, the medical school, the nursing school and the dental school joined it. There are also six groups of ethno-mathematicians in the world, one of them in Colombia, at the School of Mathematics of the National University. Professor Myriam Acevedo told her students to think about the teaching of mathematics to the indigenous people in the Amazon region. The school of Sussex in England, with Robert Chambers, adapted PAR as the quick and easy application of action research to solve concrete, short-term problems. They call it Quick Participatory Diagnosis (RPD). Cendales et al, 'One sows the seed,' 36-37.

and adopted everywhere as part of a course' they no longer serve their purpose of being radical, of seeking radical changes in society.⁶⁶ Oslender Ulrich pointed out that, even though 'research councils are increasingly interested in funding collaborative research proposals, seemingly willing to listen to and learn from the experiences of subaltern groups ... much collaborative research reinvents itself today without reference to the pioneering work of Fals Borda and others'.⁶⁷

The various developments, and variations, of PAR across different latitudes and cultural milieus must undoubtedly be seen as a positive process of enrichment. In Colombia, however, after more than sixty years of uninterrupted conflict — worsened by the emergence of a new wave of *la Violencia* during the first decade of the twenty-first century — forgetting the origins and ideological leaning of PAR is, to a certain extent, denying its *raison d'être*. Although successfully applied worldwide in modelling popular systems of adult education, PAR in Colombia, as mentioned in Chapter 2, 'had a demonic midwife: ancestral political violence', which called for a radical critique and a reorientation of social theory and practice.⁶⁸

There is yet another reason why overlooking PAR's origins undermines its critical potential. PAR was Fals-Borda's critique of violence in practice. He was not a pacifist — his approach deals with violence as a constitutive element of social life, and with politics as a field of struggle. As he wrote to Karl Eric Knutsson:

⁶⁶ 'The World Bank had to create an internal participation group in order to impose its rules of popular participation on the agreements and contracts it signed with governments. Today there is no World Bank agreement that does not contain a clause on the application of PAR or the quick diagnosis.' In this vein, United Nations agencies have also created their own PAR teams. Cendales et al, 'One sows the seed,' 41.

⁶⁷ For instance, Pain's action-orientated research published in *Human Geography* (2003, 2004, 2006), and Geraldine Pratt (2000). Quoted in Oslender, Ulrich, 'Leaving the Field: How to Write About Disappointment and Frustration in Collaborative Research,' in *Bridging Scholarship and Activism: Reflections from the Frontlines of Collaborative Research*, (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2015), 65.

⁶⁸ Fals-Borda, 'Action Research in the Convergence of Disciplines,' *International Journal of Action Research*, vol. 9 no. 2 (2013): 162.

My trip to Vienna, Budapest and Tehran was incredibly interesting and I wish I could have time and a better opportunity to talk with you about it. Many lessons were learned by me on the different “types of socialism” and the problems of national construction of a socialist system; and also on the internal mechanism of political change in repressive societies. I am happy I did not cancel my trip to Iran, as I arrived exactly in the time of turmoil where new elements erupt, new perspectives are open, thus facilitating observation by visiting sociologists like myself.⁶⁹

However, as political activist and intellectual committed to the less privileged social groups, his main concern was ‘how to overcome violence as the main (or only) way to achieve social or economic change’.⁷⁰ Herein lies the core of the concept of Participation.

Chapter 6 emphasised that PAR, although germinal in Fals-Borda’s early innovative praxis, only developed after a long and arduous process of both practice–theory and criticism. This distinction between the two aspects is important – and not only for the sake of chronological accuracy. Understanding ‘participation’ as one of the techniques of research–action is to confuse the aim with the means. The various techniques such as collective research, recovery of historical memory, valuing and applying folk culture, and the acquisition and diffusion of new knowledge are indeed the means to achieve participation. In this light, participation is the cornerstone of a counter-discourse, and PAR is the method.⁷¹

Participatory discourse is what Chapter 6 called PAR’s ontology; that is, the critique of the asymmetry implied in the subject/object relationship which characterised hierarchical order, and traditional social research too. In contrast to the use of ‘popular participation’, a term much manipulated by governmental development projects, *Participation* (as it was assimilated by PAR) was a horizontal resolution of the tension

⁶⁹ Letter to Karl Eric Knutsson, SAREC, Stockholm, on 8 September 1978. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Correspondencia_Internacional, Sub-folder Suecia, SAREC_Correspondencia_1978_03.

⁷⁰ Letter to Majid Rahnema, France on 20 June 1989. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Congresos_Asociaciones, Sub-folder IGGRI_Premio_Hoffman_IGGRI_077.

⁷¹ Fals-Borda, ‘The application of Participatory-Action Research,’ 81.

between subject and object that in turn developed and incorporated a different kind of knowledge and communication. ‘According to participatory theory,’ says Fals-Borda, ‘such a relationship must be transformed into a subject/subject one. Indeed, the destruction of the asymmetry binomial is the kernel of the concept of participation as understood in the present context and in other aspects of daily life (family, health, education, politics).’⁷²

This counter-discourse, usually overlooked, even by practitioners of PAR, was the basis of two of Fals-Borda’s key projects in the 1980s and 1990s: the creation of social movements at national and international level and the unification of the left in Colombia in order to counter the traditional bi-partisan system. At a time when more than 3,000 leaders of the Communist Party *Union Patriótica*, among them three presidential candidates, were assassinated in Colombia, these projects of Fals-Borda’s were of the utmost importance. In fact, documents about developments of PAR, and the organisation of popular socio-political movements, make up the largest part of Fals-Borda’s personal archive.

As mentioned in Chapter 6, at the International Group for Grassroots Initiatives (IGGRI), Fals-Borda had both his most sympathetic interlocutors and his most determined critics. At the annual meeting of IGGRI in 1988, Fals-Borda put forward PAR as method and philosophy of work, which he envisaged as the contribution towards the birth of a new paradigm of grassroots political participation: ‘If we remember PAR’s claims that it can work toward the construction of symmetric subject/subject relations in society as well as combine the best of traditional academic knowledge with pertinent people’s science, perhaps we can still justify our work and

⁷² Fals-Borda, ‘The application of Participatory-Action Research,’ 82.

our existence as persons committed to justice and enlightenment ... Could we still offer a “re-enchantment bridge” between such dimensions?’⁷³

Two years later, Fals-Borda cancelled his participation in the meeting of IGGRI in Helsinki. He had been elected as one of the seventy representatives for the Constitutional National Assembly on 09 December 1990. After three decades of socio-political struggle, Fals-Borda’s theoretical concerns such as the importance of ‘insurrection of subjugated knowledge’ and the need to change society’s ethos into a more open, liberating, tolerant culture had found an institutional channel for political agency. As he wrote to Luis Lopezllera:

Es una oportunidad increíble de construir en este país, por fin, una tercera fuerza política que acabe de romper el bipartidismo tradicional. A mí se me ha clasificado ya como el vocero de los movimientos sociales, aunque inesperadamente fueron electos también dos indígenas y dos evangélicos, con quienes por supuesto, he hecho alianzas. El movimiento que me postuló, la Alianza Democrática M19 es también una suma de tales movimientos y partidos de izquierda. Estamos construyendo esta alternativa, y yo ‘con alma, vida y sombrero’. Espero que tú y mis compañeros de IGGRI entiendan esta especial coyuntura, su inmensa importancia para el pueblo colombiano, y la oportunidad que me ofrece de impulsar desde bien arriba en la estructura del poder estatal, los ideales por los que siempre he venido luchando.⁷⁴

Fals-Borda’s ideology critique did not comprise theoretical analyses of the ideologies of socio-political groups in conflict. Nor was it a comparative analysis of antagonist ideologies. His critique was a praxis: critical and historical thinking confronted with practice in the field which, in turn, was the object of analysis and self-reflection (*pronesis*) with the aim of returning to the realm of action. It was even more complex (and innovative) because the process was not confined to the experience of the individual social researcher. His aim was awakening people’s transformative potential

⁷³ IGGRI Meeting, New Delhi, 1 April, 1988. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Investigación_Acción_Participativa, Sub-folder IAP_Otros Países_Debate_Majid Rahnema_004.

⁷⁴ Letter to Luis Lopezllera (Instituto de Promoción del Desarrollo Popular), 21 January 1991. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Congresos_Asociaciones, Sub-folder IGGRI_Premio Hoffman_IGGRI_094.

and achieving self-empowerment. In so doing, Fals-Borda reinterpreted Marx's *XI Thesis on Feuerbach*: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.'⁷⁵ Fals-Borda's conviction was that critically interpreting the world in conjunction with the people (not only for the people), and particularly with the destitute, was the only effective way to change it. As he wrote in a letter to Anisur Rahman: 'You will note that my concern was on praxis, and specifically on the relationship between theory and practice in a concrete situation: work with deprived peasants here.'⁷⁶

A final reflection on Empirical Utopianism

Fals-Borda's intellectual work has no parallel in Colombia. This is not to diminish whatsoever the quality and relevance of other well accomplished scholars and intellectuals. What this means is that there is one particular feature in his works: although solidly grounded in scholarship, they were acts of utopianism. His Master's and PhD dissertations (1955, 1957): attempts to foster an agrarian reform; his study on *la Violencia* (1962): an effort to raise ethical awareness; his *Subversion* (1967, 1968, 1969): a call to historical awakening; his research with the people of the *History of the Atlantic Coast* (1978–1986): a means for political empowerment; further editions of both the study of *la Violencia* in 2005 and *Subversion* in 2008: an image of the past that 'flashes up in a moment of danger'. These among many others, when published, were looked upon as dreams. With the benefit of hindsight, the material bases of Fals-Borda's

⁷⁵ Marxists Internet Archive. Accessed 15 April 2016.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/.../theses/theses.pdf>.

⁷⁶ Letter on 22 October 1979. ACH-UN, FOFB. Digital. Folder Correspondencia_Internacional, Sub-folder Suiza_Correspondencia_1979_03.

utopianism can be discerned; that is, the element that projects the dialectics between past and present towards a future to-be-achieved. This was his search for a different experience from that which had been bequeathed to him.

As it was demonstrated in his works, critique was inseparable from empirical imagination. He knew something different that the overwhelming experience of the adults could neither have given to him nor taken away — this was his truth; to it he owed his fidelity. ‘The youth will experience spirit,’ says Benjamin, ‘and when he becomes a man, the youth will be compassionate. The philistine is intolerant.’⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Walter Benjamin, ‘Experience,’ 1913, in Vol. 1 of *Selected Writings 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), 5.

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